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07

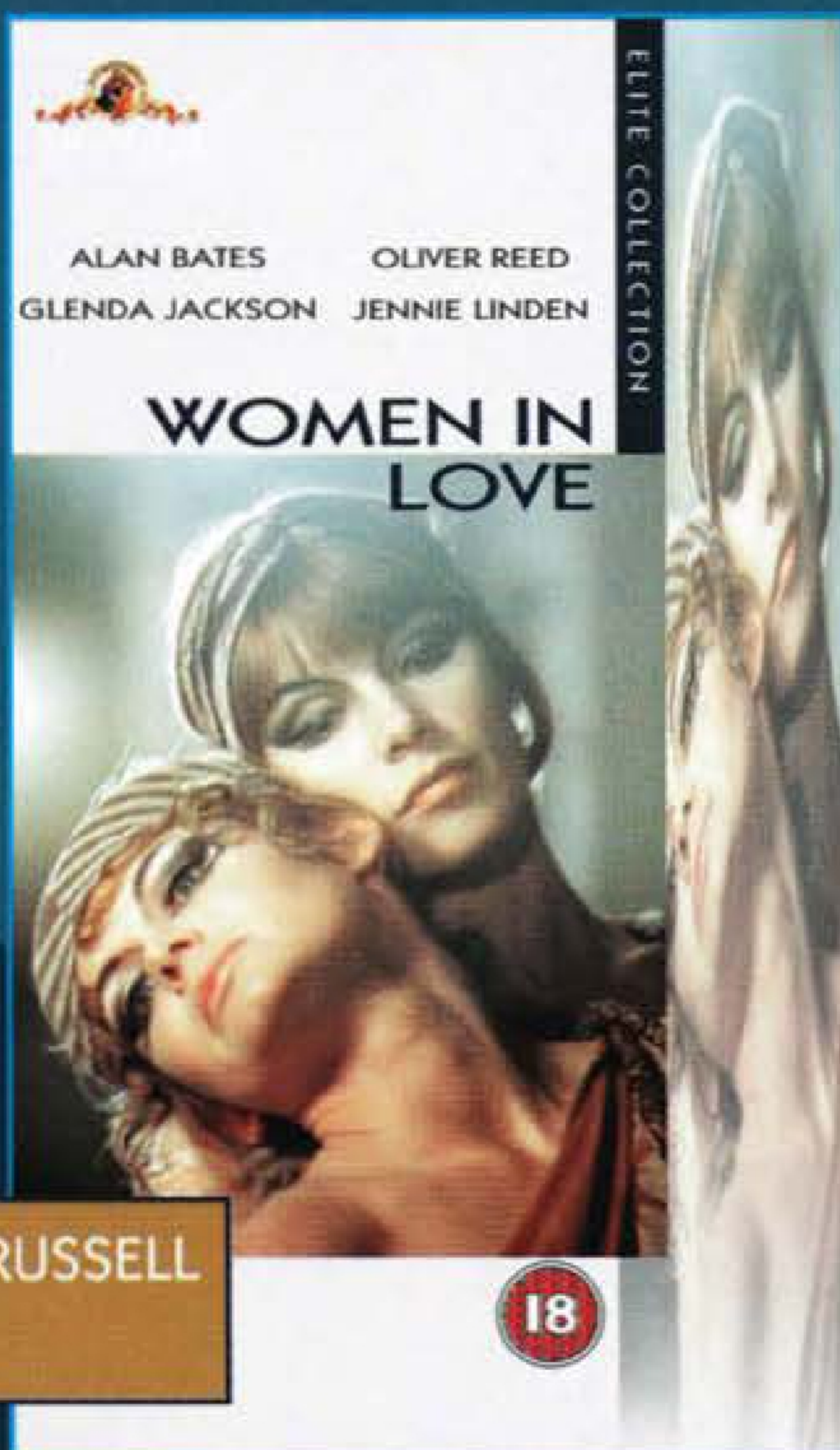


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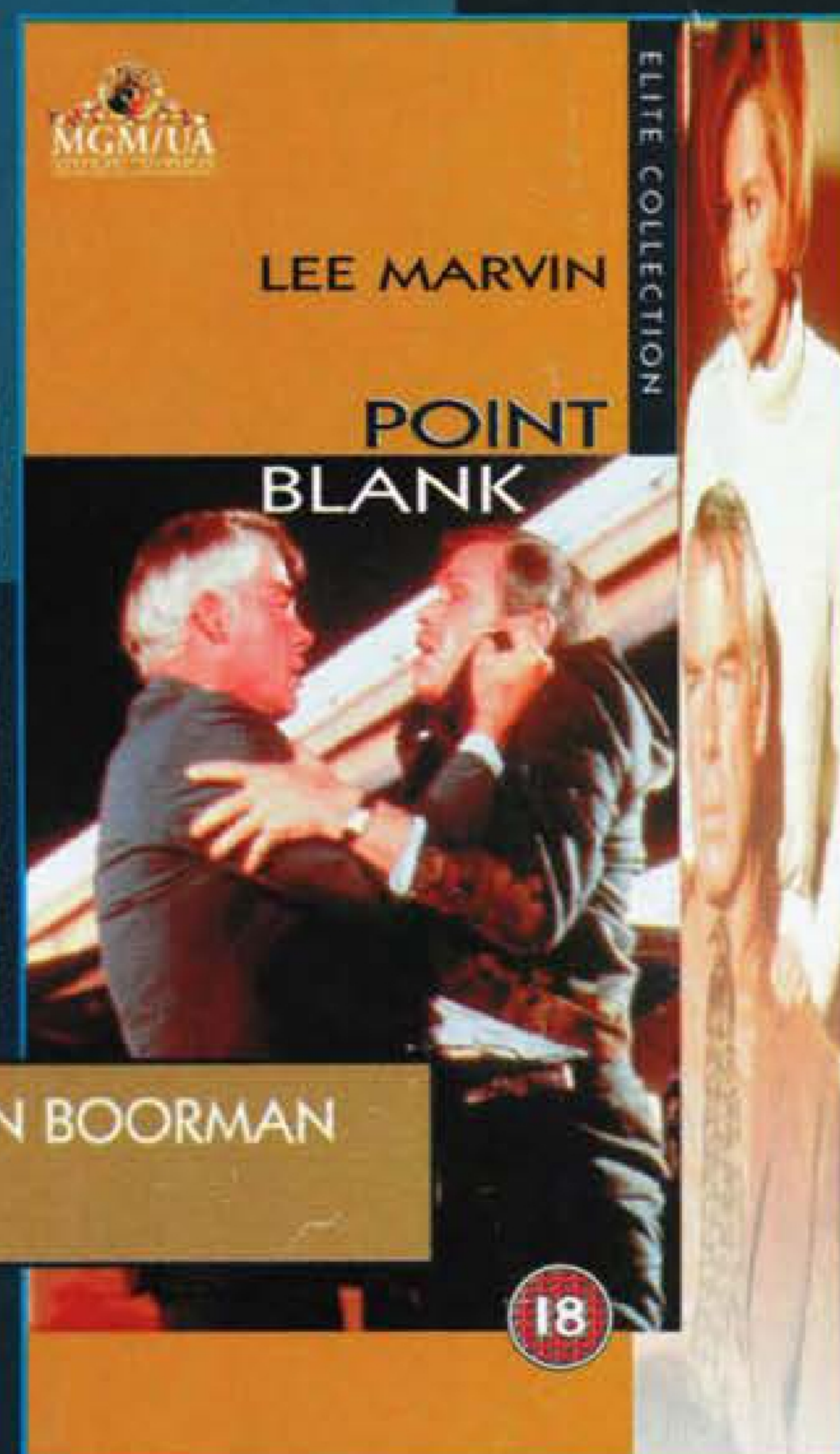
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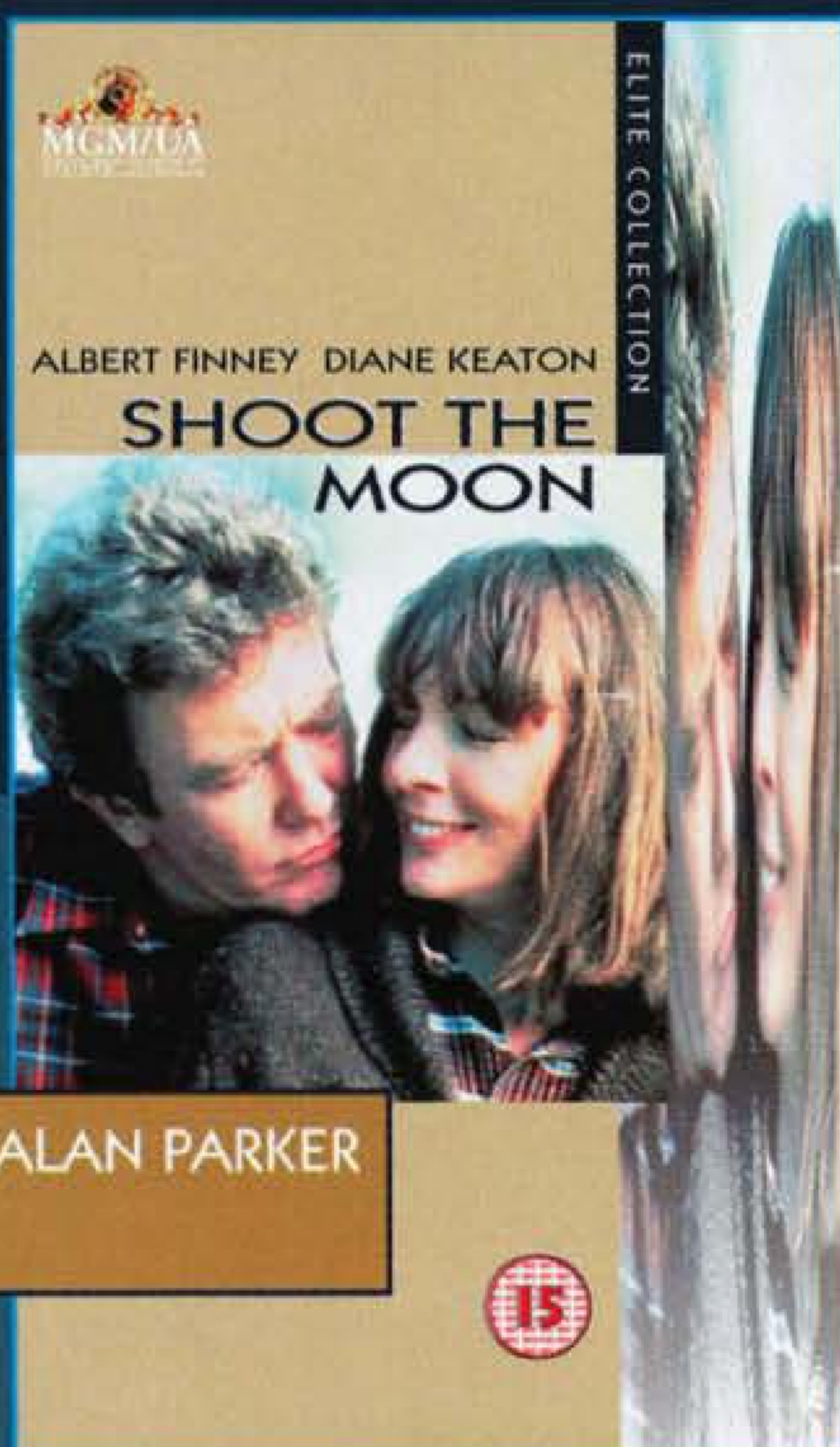
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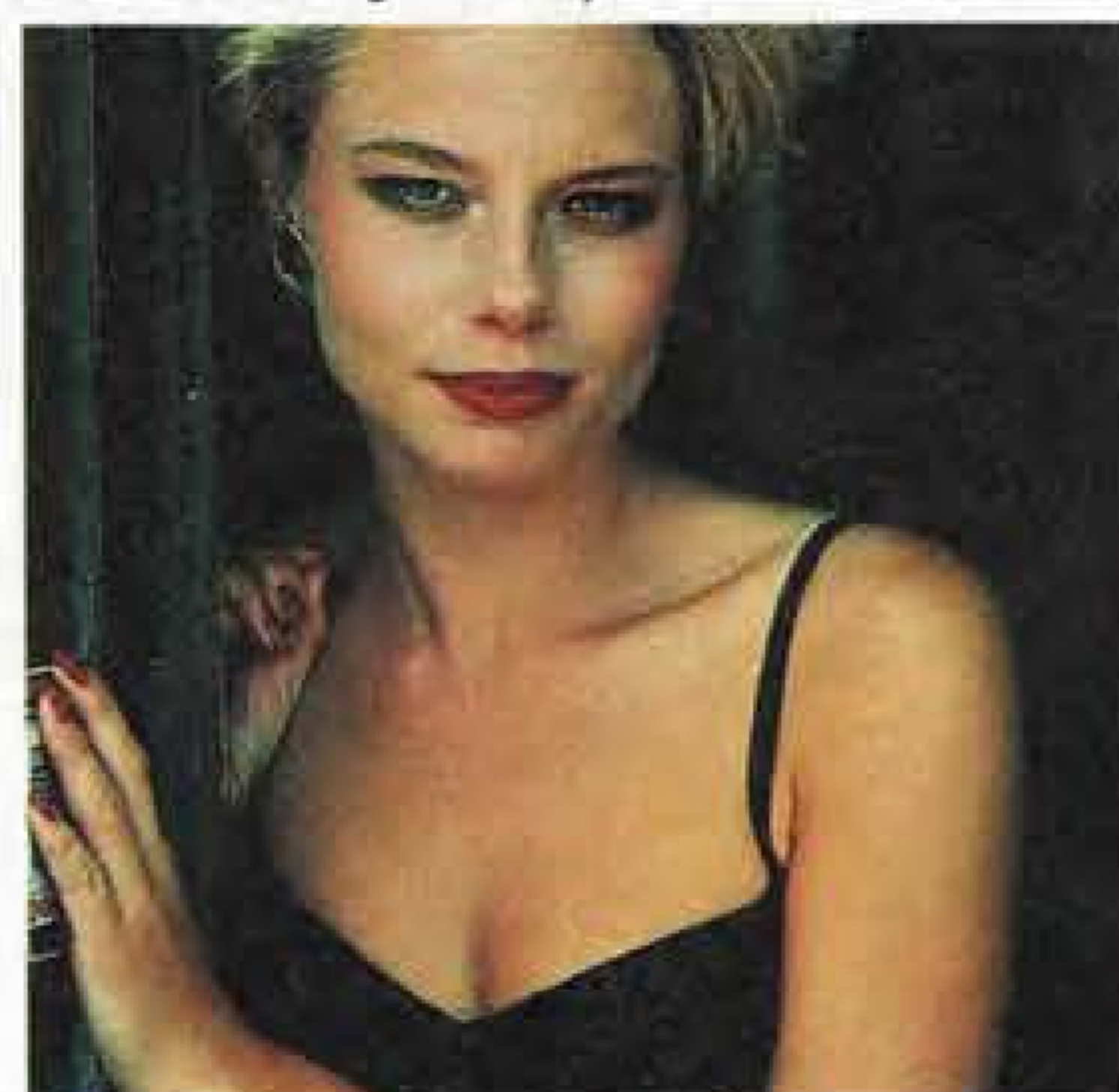


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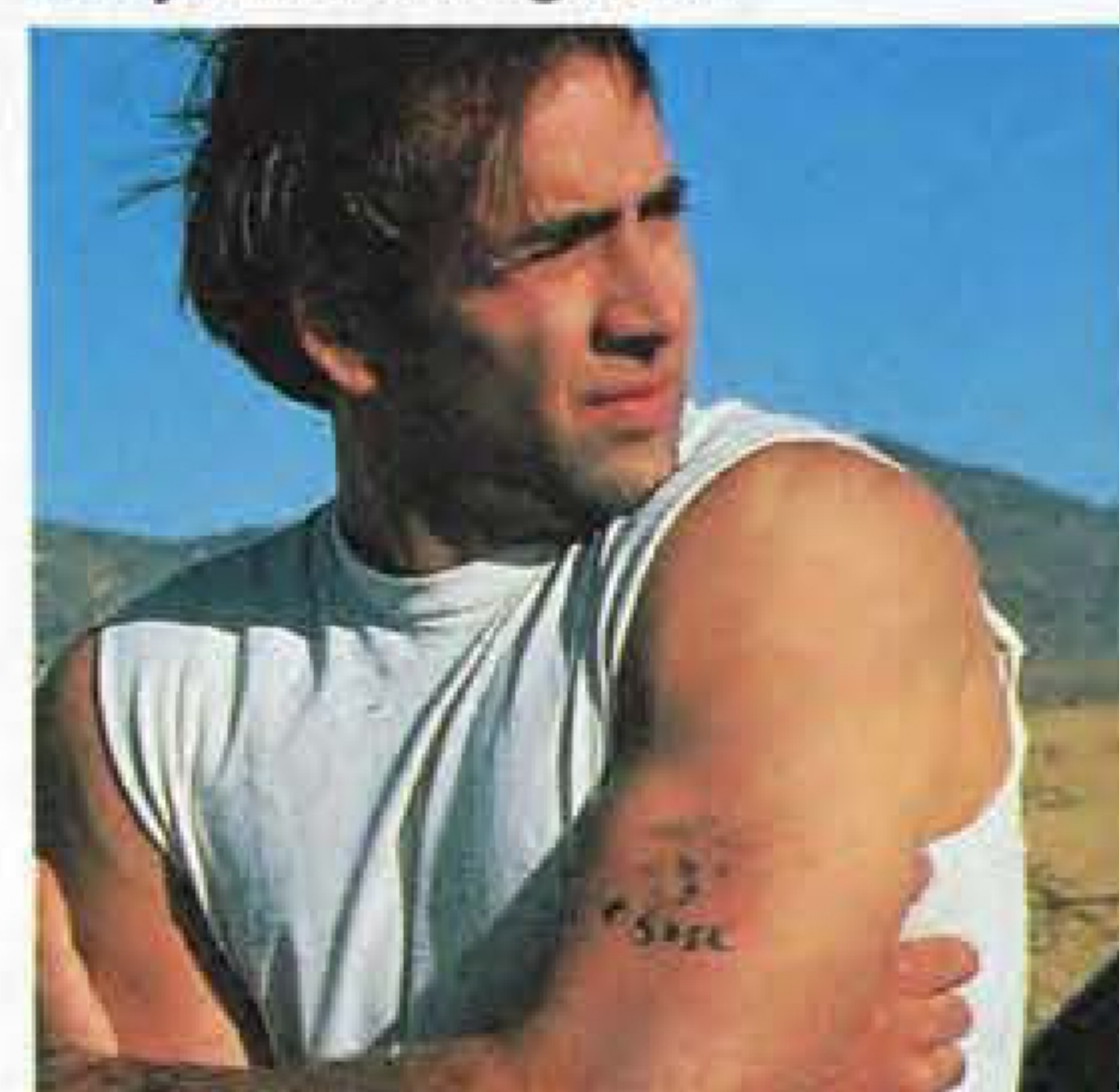
Sight and Sound



A Chinese story: 'Bodo', 16



Nutley's 'House of Angels': 20



'Red Rock West': 49

Features

THEME PARKS AND VARIATIONS

Peter Wollen on *Jurassic Park*,
monster movies and Hitchcock
Plus Henry Sheehan on Spielberg,
death and children **6**

EROTIC THRILLERS AND RUDE WOMEN

What do *Indecent Proposal* and
Carnal Crimes have in common?
And who enjoys such films?
By Linda Ruth Williams **12**

DREAM ON

Tony Rayns sees new and
unfinished films in China – and
experiences the rock scene **16**

FACING THE SUN

Colin Nutley, the British director
of the Swedish film, *House of
Angels*, talks with Philip Kemp **20**

HIJACKED

Have *The Assassin* and *Sommersby*
been able to take what's best
from the French originals?
By Ginette Vincendeau **22**

SIBLING RIVALRY

Why has the video camera
become such an important player
in recent films, from *Patriot
Games* to *L.627*? By Chris Darke
Plus Rod Stoneman on Godard's
Histoire(s) du cinéma **26**

Regulars

EDITORIAL National trends **3**

THE BUSINESS Altman... Rank...
Easy Rider II ... **4**

OBSESSION Leslie Megahey on
a haunting face in *Vampyr* **31**

BOOKS Marilyn Monroe;
Hollywood and masculinity;
early comedy; the new
Hollywood; Russian women **32**

LETTERS Censorship; BBFC;
Clockwork Orange; cult films **64**

Film reviews

Anglagård/House of Angels	36
Assassin, The	36
Benny and Joon	37
Boxing Helena	38
Cliffhanger	39
Cop and a Half	40
Cows/Vacas	54
Equinox	41
Fencing Master, The/ El Maestro de esgrima	47
Fire in the Sky	42
House of Angels/Anglagård	36
I Was on Mars	43
Jungfrauenmaschine, Die/ Virgin Machine	44
King's Whore, The	45
Mad Dog and Glory	46
Madame Bovary	47
Maestro de esgrima, El/ The Fencing Master	47
Mistress	48
Old Lady Who Walked in the Sea, The/La Vieille qui marchait dans la mer	55
Red Rock West	49
South Central	50
Sure Fire	51
Swing Kids	52
3 Ninja Kids	53
Trial, The	53
Vacas/Cows	54
Vieille qui marchait dans la mer, La/The Old Lady Who Walked in the Sea	55
Virgin Machine/ Jungfrauenmaschine, Die	44
Wide Sargasso Sea	56

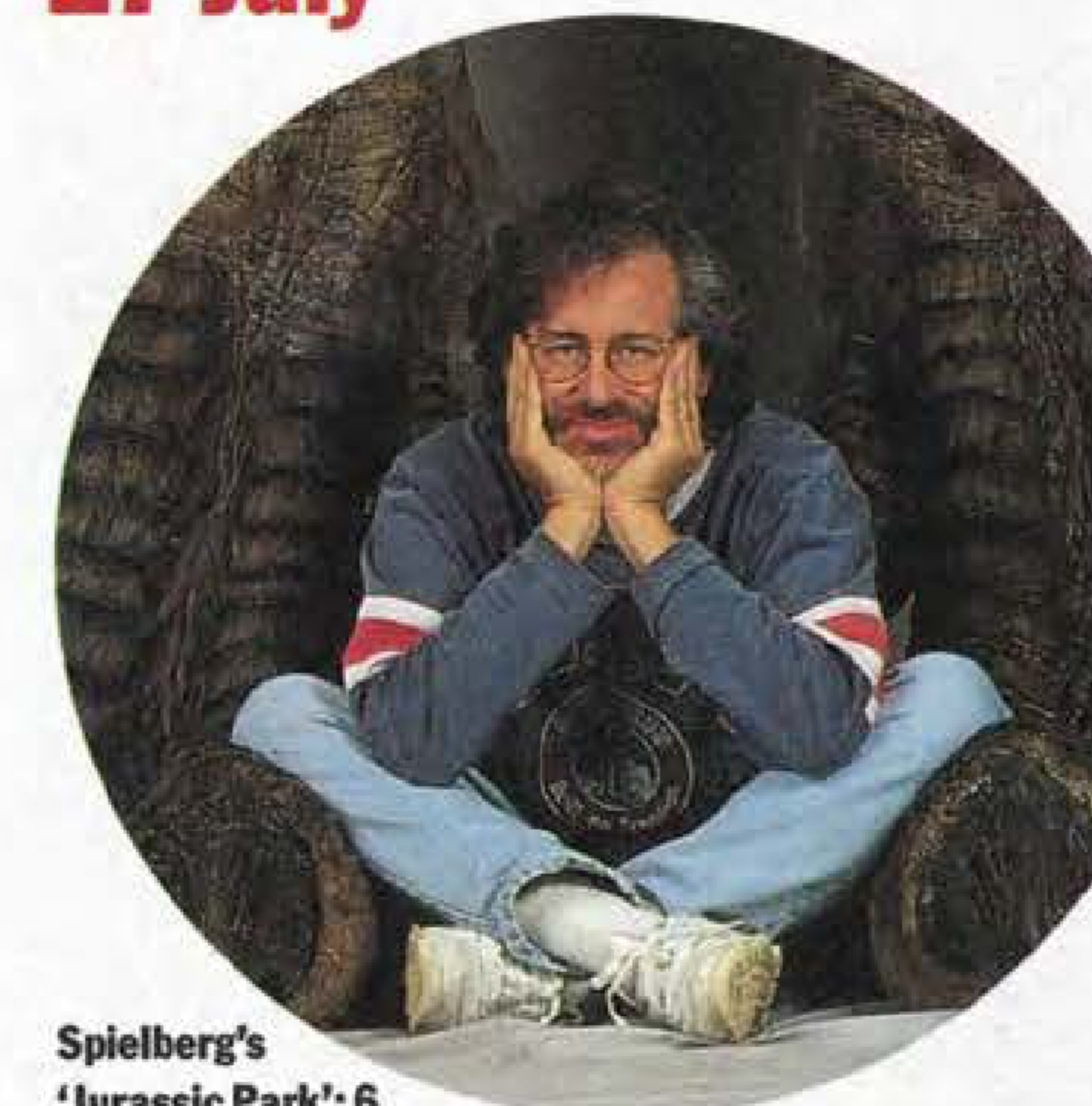
Television films

Histoire(s) du cinéma/ History(ies) of the Cinema	57
History(ies) of the Cinema/ Histoire(s) du cinéma	57

Video reviews

Mark Kermode and Peter Dean
on this month's video and
laser disc releases **58**

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Spielberg's
'Jurassic Park': 6

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National trends

Contributors to this issue

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Tony Rayns was a member of the *Caméra d'Or* jury at this year's Cannes Film Festival

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Ginette Vincendeau is the co-editor of the recently published volume *Popular European Cinema*

Linda Ruth Williams' book *Sex in the Head*, a study of D.H. Lawrence and cinema, is published this month

Peter Wollen's latest book is a collection of essays, *Raiding the Icebox*; he is in pre-production for a Channel 4 film on John Locke

With the new commercial television system barely half a year old, the ITV companies have split into two camps lobbying for opposing changes in the rules they work under – rules which at present seem to guarantee a degree of broadcasting diversity across the regions and nations that make up the UK. Should we be taking sides?

On the face of it we most definitely should. The greatest virtue of the British ITV system has always been its regional basis. And even amid all the perils of the great franchise auction, that regional basis appeared to be protected. The same 15 regions were advertised; each has requirements for local programming more stringent than ever before; a moratorium on hostile takeovers for a year gives each company the opportunity to consolidate its regional base. Finally, cross-ownership rules guarantee that none of the nine big companies could swallow each other up (although they could each swallow one of the six small ones).

Most of the big companies, Central and Carlton in particular, now want these cross-ownership rules to be relaxed. Central's chief executive, Leslie Hill, has been arguing for years that ITV has to concentrate into half a dozen companies in order to be commercially viable. Now, it seems, most of his senior ITV colleagues agree with him.

But not all. Meridian, HTV and Anglia – the three big companies most likely to be swallowed – are opposed to loosening the cross-ownership rules and want another year's moratorium on takeovers. Heritage Secretary Peter Brooke seems to have ruled out extending the moratorium, but the possibility of changing the cross-ownership rules is still very much a live issue. The ITV companies who oppose it plead that they are defending the crucial principle of a real regional ITV. And for anyone who wants to see more pluralism in television, it seems tempting to line up behind them.

Tempting – but probably futile. One reason has been well aired by the Central/Carlton camp. Under the present rules they can't take over HTV

or Anglia, but Italy's Silvio Berlusconi or France's TF1 can, and quite likely eventually will. In most of continental Europe commercial broadcasters are national, so they have bigger economic clout than the regional British companies. Unless the British companies are beefed up in size, the argument goes, ITV's much vaunted regions will end up as branch offices of Paris or Milan.

The second reason has been less aired but is more fundamental. In the old days the big regional companies were each allocated a certain proportion of network programming for their own production in Birmingham, Manchester or Leeds as well as London. Now the Office of Fair Trading forbids such carve-ups. So editorial power will lie increasingly with the London-based ITV Network Centre, which will commission programmes from what will probably be London-based independent producers. Not the ideal recipe for a regional diversity in network television. And whether or not each of the regional companies keeps its formal independence is going to make little difference to the trend.

If efforts to prop up the old regional emphasis of the ITV system are doomed, then it is even more important that the BBC puts its regional house in order. This is not primarily a question of specifically regional programming. The corporation has always quite justly been accused of metropolitan bias (and, it should be added, a bias against a good many parts of the population of the metropolis itself). Until recently the BBC was running down network production from many of its centres outside London. Now it appears to have at least recognised the problem by establishing 'centres of excellence' in, for example, Birmingham and Manchester. As yet, however, these centres show little sign of giving a non-metropolitan flavour to their output.

The BBC needs to adopt more profound measures if it is to reflect the diversity of the population it is broadcasting to. It can no longer offer itself the (always feeble) excuse that ITV will take care of the regional aspect of that task.

JERRY ON LINE #1

James Sillavan – Peter Lydon ©



'Jerry, I've always said that this studio puts stories before stars – that we don't get into bed with stars because they're stars; that we would be a beacon of sense in a star-obsessed town... then this morning I had a call from Arnie, he's got a gap in Spring '95...'

The sarcastic Mr Altman... Rank and the minister... six for Russia... 'Easy Rider II'

The business

● "Why can't he make up his mind?" muttered the PR person, suddenly faced with the need to accommodate Robert Altman and set up a major press conference for him three days into the Cannes Film Festival. A week earlier, Altman – whose new film, *Short Cuts*, was not ready for Cannes and has its world premiere at Venice in September – had reportedly stated that he would definitely not be coming to the Côte d'Azur. Not, of course, that the PR person would have dreamed of reminding the Great Director of this fact: forgetting what the client said yesterday is a basic PR skill. Besides, sailing into the north of Mr A's notably fiery disposition is recommended only to the extremely thick-skinned.

The scatter-gun of Altman's sarcasm, sporadically levelled at Hollywood over the past two decades, has recently been turned on one or two lesser – and rather less-deserving – targets, notably the Paris-based producer Ludi Boeken, who was rash enough to (a) produce and (b) disagree with Big Bob over certain contractual aspects of *Vincent and Theo*. And potential targets are now beginning to multiply, since the director's presence in Cannes was designed to do more than remind the world of his existence: it was to promote what can only be described as the relaunch of the once prolific Altman industry.

With *Short Cuts* in the can (accompanied by a few off-the-record remarks that if distributors thought they were getting "another *The Player*, they're in for a shock"), and his next directorial chore, *Prêt-à-porter*, finally financed after 10 years in the wilderness, Altman is putting himself about with an energy that would do credit to a man 20 years his junior (he was 68 in February). He will, for instance, be producing *Mrs Parker* (in which Jennifer Jason Leigh plays the divine Dorothy) for former protégé Alan Rudolph, and in conjunction with *The Player* executive producer Cary Brokaw is developing a movie version of Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning Aids play, *Angels in America*.

Back in Los Angeles, meanwhile, Michael Tolkin – writer of *The Player* – is currently shooting *New Age*, about life on the city's Melrose Avenue, which went from tawdry to super-fashionable and back to tawdry in the same five years that saw the 80s rise and fall.

And all of this presumably funded by that same industry motivated by "greed and [run by] people who take, take, take" (Robert Altman, Cannes, 9 May 1992).

Neo-realism is making a comeback in Italy: two of the biggest projects to be announced this summer are worlds away from the elegant nostalgia and sentimentality of recent Italian hits, focusing on famous real-life murders, one recent, the other not so recent.

Giuseppe Ferrara – who, having directed 'Il caso Moro' ('The Moro Affair'), is something



Premiere: Jane Campion's 'The Piano', joint winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes 1993

of a specialist in the genre – is currently preparing 'Giovanni Falcone', about the Palermo killing of the prominent anti-Mafia judge. Michele Placido – well known to Italian television audiences for tackling the mob in his hugely successful series 'Octopus' – will play Falcone, with Giancarlo Giannini taking the role of Judge Paolo Borsellino. And director Mario Tullio Giordano has just started work on 'Pier Paolo Pasolini: Un delitto italiano', about the murder of the director on a beach near Ostia in 1975 – an event which remains the subject of much speculation.

● Shock, horror, it's official: Cannes is fauché (broke). Source? None other than top local party organiser Henri Deleuze. Shindig spending this May was down by as much as 30 per cent on last year, according to Deleuze, who said that companies were being much more frugal and shelling out only on essential marketing operations.

Under this heading he presumably included the 50-foot inflatable Arnold Schwarzenegger moored in the bay throughout the first half of the festival. Or did he mean the crudely mechanised *Jurassic Park* dinosaur cut-out which opened and shut its jaws every 10 seconds outside the Carlton Hotel, like a noddie-dog in the back window of some pre-historic Ford Capri? Or perhaps it was the Jean-Claude Van Damme hot-air balloon he had in mind? Or...

Mind you, those who affect to know about these things were just as busy declaring the festival cinematically bankrupt – and in terms that, had they been used as slogans, would have been suspected of coming from the same agency.

"There's little, if any, surprising buzz developing here," wrote James Ulmer in 'The Hollywood Reporter' on Tuesday 18 May. "This 46th festival just hasn't produced any discoveries that are setting cinema seats on fire as, for example, 'Strictly Ballroom' did last year."

There were, moaned Todd McCarthy in 'Variety' on 24 May, "no unexpected gems that enabled audiences to feel they had discovered important new talent... The Market was a total void... no 'Strictly Ballroom' to excite the flash commercial market."

Now I know that to be enthusiastic about Cannes is about as cool as arguing that Rod Stewart can sing. But it seems to me that any festival that can premiere 'The Piano', 'Farewell to My Concubine', 'Naked', 'Raining Stones', 'The Puppetmaster' and 'Cliffhanger' – any festival in which a quiet little gem like the Tavianis' 'Fiorile' is completely overshadowed – ain't doing half bad. And the Market did have its discoveries: Mike Sarne's comeback pic 'The Punk' and US indie effort 'Public Access', for instance.

Still, good to see such a convergence of opinion among the opinion-makers. Or is it that the definition of 'buzz' is what one trade journalist says to another, in the same way that "many feel..." is hack-speak for "I think"?

And by the way, 'Strictly Ballroom' was in last year's official selection, not a chance discovery in the depths of the Market.

● Speaking of *Variety*, what is happening to the showbiz bible, which used to boast "more bureaus than the New York Times"? Since Reed International took over from the founding Silverman family (the last member of whom left early this year), the bureaus in Madrid, Paris, Rome and Stockholm have gone. Veteran writers like Hank Werba (Rome), Jack Kindred (Munich) and Keith Keller (Stockholm) – whose lifetime of film industry reporting was one of the things that gave *Variety* its authority – have been dumped.

London, one of the last remaining full bureaus, is rumoured to be due for a major scaling-down. And the entire New York operation (home of the loss-making weekly edition) is apparently scheduled to be shifted to the Los Angeles base of the profitable daily *Variety*,

now that the two publications have been merged under a single editor (their word, not mine).

Just before Cannes, Deborah Young, the last remaining continental European reporter with a solid art-and-industry track record (she was based in Rome) announced plans to quit, having reportedly been offered the calculated insult of a freelance job. And Claudia Eller, one of the longest-serving Los Angeles-based reporters, has left to join the *LA Times*.

Still, not to worry: *Variety* still gets to you a week ahead of the opposition, thanks to a wheeze dreamed up by the aforementioned editor. "Beginning with next week's issue," read a tiny note in the 24 May issue, "*Variety* will be dated one week in advance. Consequently, the issue that hits the newsstands Monday 31 May will be dated Monday 7 June." Yes, and my next column will be a Christmas special.

One thing that has been operating absolutely true to form recently has been the UK film establishment. In Cannes, Rank announced another major plan to put all its money into American movies – something which it has been doing on a regular three-year cycle for as long as anyone can be bothered to remember. In fact, so unusual is it for the company to put its money anywhere else that when the company did back a British film ('Just Like a Woman'), someone from Rank rang me up to point out the fact...

● Also at Cannes, the British Film Commission proudly unveiled its new promotional video, an interminable travelogue made up of stock shots of Beautiful Britain which looked as though it had been made for the video wall at Heathrow Underground.

As part of the same treat, the BFC wheeled in the pink and portly Films Minister Robert Key, who said that the video showed you why there were so

many British films at Cannes this year: because there was such an extraordinary variety of locations to choose from. (Actually, the only Britfilm in Cannes needing a difficult location, the BFI-produced *Anchoress*, which is set in medieval Britain, had to be shot in Belgium. The Belgian government also subsidised it, but that's another story.)

The rest of Key's speech couldn't really be checked for accuracy, since it contained hardly a single fact. Given that the minister would hardly have bothered to come to Cannes to tell the world he thought films were a waste of time and any British film-maker who didn't go to Hollywood was an idiot, he could hardly have said less than he did. Out came the usual old guff about listening carefully to what the industry

had to say, with vague promises of a real announcement later in the year.

The whole farrago came full circle when Key got reshuffled the following week to the Ministry of Transport (perhaps the BFC should let him take the video with him). He was replaced by Iain Sproat, who used to be Films Minister before he bucked all the trends by managing to lose his seat in the 1983 Conservative landslide.

Wardour Street – the distribution/exhibition end of the UK film business – is crowing with delight: Sproat set in motion the abolition of the Eady Levy, the tax on cinema seats which provided the only workable form of film production subsidy the UK ever had.

The recent announcement that six top directors were going to contribute to a

portmanteau film about life in Russia, along the lines of the 1965 classic, 'Paris vu par', might presumably have been expected to help the international profile of the crisis-ridden Russian Federation.

The only trouble is that the six directors chosen are of much the same vintage as 'Paris vu par'. Surely the producers could have found a slightly more 'now' assortment than Lina Wertmüller, Peter Bogdanovich, Jean-Luc Godard, Werner Herzog, Ken Russell and Nobuhiko Ohbayashi?

● Since Christmas, there has been general agreement that three films would dominate this summer's box office: *Cliffhanger* (Sylvester Stallone up a Dolomite), *Jurassic Park* (young master Spielberg and a lot of reanimated monsters) and *Last Action Hero* (big Arnie plus a cute kid). At least one of them

provides interesting lessons in how the best laid plans can go awry. Both *Jurassic Park* and *Cliffhanger* have slowly and carefully built up expectations, the former with a terrific trailer, the latter by playing its cards very close to its chest. But for Columbia's *Last Action Hero*, things have made a repeated habit of going wrong.

Plans to paint the film's name on the side of a space shuttle seemed great – until NASA pointed out that the shuttle wouldn't be launched until at least two months after the film opened. An early test screening in the LA suburb of Lakewood – about as echt as you can get – produced distinctly unblockbusting results (one viewer told the *LA Times* he didn't fill in his test card because he was a Schwarzenegger fan and didn't want to be impolite). A special demonstration of the new Sony Dynamic Digital Sound System used in the film was not exactly a heart-stopper. And then throughout early June, Hollywood ran wild with stories of last-minute reshoots, re-edits and general damage limitation.

Of course it'll probably be all right on the night (which falls midway between press time and publication for this issue of *Sight and Sound*). But then again...

This summer will see the planning, production or release of a more than usually large number of sequels: 'Sister Act 2', 'Wayne's World II' (reportedly with Kim Basinger), 'Die Hard III', 'Naked Gun 3', 'Rambo IV'...

But all pale into insignificance beside the longest-awaited sequel of them all. Dennis Hopper has finally agreed to direct 'Easy Rider II', almost 25 years since he and Peter Fonda first set their motors running.

Leaving aside the question of whether Messrs H and F can still operate anything more powerful than a golf cart, a number of major details still need to be worked out, not least the fact that both the central protagonists were blasted into oblivion by a redneck shotgun at the end of the original movie.

Perhaps they will be reconstituted from scraps of DNA scraped off the Louisiana blacktop.

● Finally, in case you were looking for the clincher in picking the site for your summer holidays, Beijing Studios have come up with the ultimate August attraction for the people: the Beijing Studios Tour.

If the crumbling ones outside aren't enough, you can entertain yourself by strolling the studio's Ancient Streets. Or take part in a traditional wedding procession. Or, if none of the above appeals, a visit to the Thrilling Scenes Producing Room should do the trick.

I repeat all this verbatim, incidentally, from a recent issue of *The Hollywood Reporter*, which obviously doesn't believe in sub-editing the press releases it receives, since the highlight of the Tour is listed as a visit to the "Biggest Stydui in Asia".

Sidneyland beware.

CANNES NOTES

In *Body Snatchers*, Abel Ferrara's spooky jab at the dysfunctional family and the only decent Hollywood film competing at Cannes this year, Gabrielle Anwar's cute little brother is in a quandary. He has in one day seen his preschool mates produce identical fingerpaintings, then watched his stepmother's body crumble and be re-cloned. He refuses to go to class or stay home alone with his father's wife, so Dad gives him an ultimatum: "Day care or Mommy!" The double bind is an apt metaphor for the limited choices available at Cannes to the cinephile, especially from the competition. *Louis, l'enfant roi?* *Douba-Douba?* *King of the Hill?*

Although considered the most glamorous of the festivals, Cannes occupies an uncertain place among its chief rivals. Berlin, in spite of a weak competitive section, is known for 'difficult' films, in terms of both content (Panorama) and form (the Forum). (At Cannes, even the Directors Fortnight, created in the aftermath of the '68 riots, has shifted its focus from experimental to more accessible works.) Venice has an uneven track record, but its competition often includes Hollywood and other movies not ready for Cannes in May. Some film-makers actually prefer to debut at Venice: Scorsese, Altman and Godard are premiering new works there this year. Cannes could be said to specialise in weak commercial films and dilettantish art-house fodder – with a few masterpieces.

The May date is a problem for Cannes, especially as the festival wants well-known stars to attend. Few films from the American majors are ready and a summer release pattern in Europe is unprofitable. Festival director Gilles Jacob was thwarted recently in his attempt to move the event to autumn (hoteliers like the May date and the city is a major funder), so he programmes

whatever the studios offer. He accepts some films for obvious star value (*Falling Down* this year, *Close to Eden* last year) and others seemingly to fill slots (*Splitting Heirs*). *Variety* quoted Jacob as blaming the slim pickings on Hollywood's mediocre movies and cowardly executives, prompting Columbia's Mark Canton to quip: "The last thing that is important is if it's ready for a film festival!"

Hollywood uses Cannes for one purpose: promotion, usually for films and events that have nothing to do with the festival. Elizabeth Taylor came this year to raise funds for Aids; Schwarzenegger and Van Damme were hyped for films unscreened.

The three American independent films in Un Certain Regard are among the weakest, but they all have name actors. Jim McBride's *The Wrong Man* has Rosanna Arquette, Kevin Anderson and John Lithgow; Philip Haas' *The Music of Chance* has James Spader and Mandy Patinkin; and Michael Steinberg's *Bodies, Rest & Motion* has Bridget Fonda, Eric Stoltz, Tim Roth and Phoebe Cates. (Only the International Critics Week chose solid and original American independent films – for example Thomas Fucci's hilarious suicide send-up *Don't Call Me Frankie* and Tony Chan's slick green card comedy *Combination Platter*.)

The *Body Snatchers* analogy also applies to the uneasy options afforded directors in the 90s. They can make low-budget personal films, with a host of technical and financial problems. The alternative is often a move towards either the studios or a packaging deal involving several production companies and personnel from any number of countries – with the potential loss of creative control.

Sometimes such partnerships work, and Cannes came up with a handful of gems. Jane Campion's *The Piano* shared the Palme d'Or with Chen Kaige's *Farewell to my Concubine*.

The Piano, set in New Zealand, has French backing (CIBY 2000), an Australian producer, a New Zealand-born director and two American leads. Campion has such an intense vision, however, that it succeeds brilliantly in capturing an era and its suppressed passions. Hou Xiaoxian's *The Puppetmaster*, a Taiwan-Hong Kong co-production, is a mesmerising biography in which every shot captures the sensuality of its subject's time and place. In the Directors Fortnight, another Chinese co-effort, Tian Zhuangzhuang's daring *The Blue Kite* (China-Hong Kong) – to this spectator's mind the most astonishing work to unspool at Cannes – refracts the political history of China in the 50s and 60s through the experiences of a young boy, with lush visuals and a spare soundtrack.

The hit-or-miss aspect of co-productions makes one long (at the risk of sounding reactionary) for the halcyon days of films with more of a single voice from a specific locale (not to undermine the First World's efforts at funding projects in the Third). Mike Leigh's touch, cynical *Naked*, for example, was produced as a feature in Britain by a British film-maker for his own company (with some Film Four backing as well). No wonder that the Cannes jury recognised Leigh as best director; the conditions were in place for him to create a consistent work.

Of course, lots of unsuccessful films are made under these same conditions. But the global recession, European co-production funds and the international packaging of projects offer little hope of strong films about real people in real places. Cannes is a barometer: the paucity of good films and a failed market bode poorly for the future. Cinephiles will have even fewer choices; in fact, we might just succumb to being cloned. Howard Feinstein



THEME PARK AND VARIATIONS

What do the monster movie 'The Lost World', the 19th-century dinosaur cult and Hitchcock's 'The Birds' share with 'Jurassic Park'? Peter Wollen explains

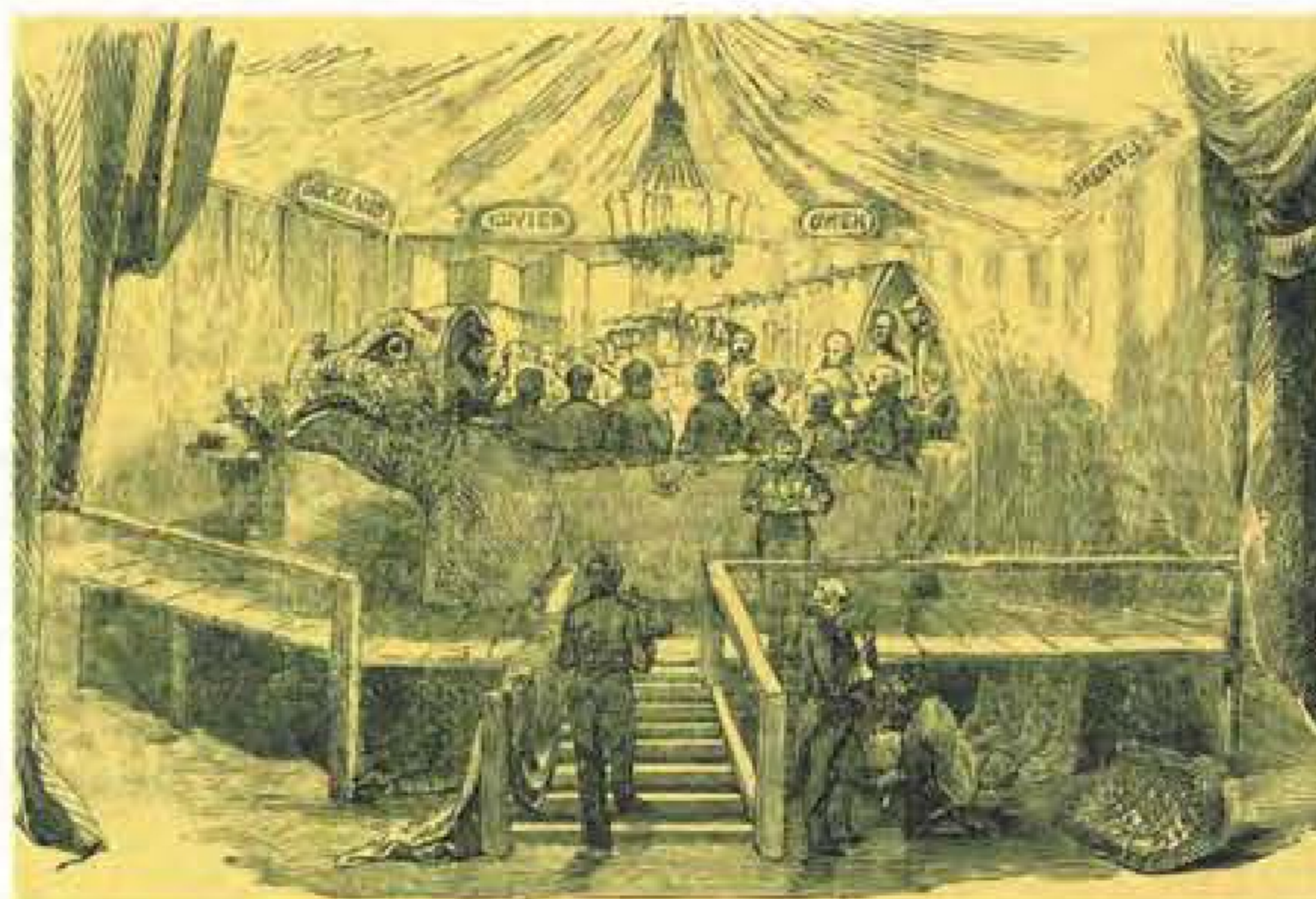
● To the cine-palaeontologist tracing the evolutionary history of film, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* appears at first to be a rather obvious hybrid of *Jaws* and writer Michael Crichton's earlier theme-park fantasy *Westworld* (1973). The hybrid is made possible at story level by the concept of genetic engineering. The idea of chromosome recombination has superseded that of robotics, which drove *Westworld*, a distant descendant of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. In *Jurassic Park*, the concept of genetic cloning allows the robot film to be interbred with the successful line of monster movies that runs from *The Lost World*, on through *King Kong*, and down to *Jaws*.

Jurassic Park also combines the *Westworld* concept of the theme park with the monster movie idea of 'The Lost World', derived from Arthur Conan Doyle. In *King Kong* the monster is captured and brought by a show-biz tycoon from its remote Pacific island home to the mass audience of New York, where it is exhibited in chains at what appears to be a version of Radio City Music Hall. In *Jurassic Park* it is the other way round: the audience is to be transported to a remote Pacific island, where the monsters are exhibited and restrained behind massive electric fences. Isla Nublar is an island resort like Cancun or Djerba, what economists call an ITZ (integrated tourist zone), self-contained and cut off from the depressing and dangerous rest of the world in the pleasure periphery. It is also a safari park, planned and built around the dinosaur theme by another visionary show-biz entrepreneur, complete with tie-in merchandising of dinosaur souvenirs and memorabilia. On the Isla Nublar, the safari park is further combined with the Natural History Museum, displaying fabulous creatures from the past whose gigantic skeletons we are familiar with from so many museum halls. Finally, there is an uncanny echo, not only of *King Kong*, but of the Galapagos Islands, which Charles Darwin visited on his fateful voyage aboard the *Beagle* and whose wildlife formed the centrepieces of his theory of natural selection.

On Isla Nublar, the technology of the future is used to recreate the extinct species of the distant past. Bio-technology, like cinema, makes it possible for us to engage in a kind of time travel. Again, instead of the tourist climbing into a time machine in order to travel back through deep time to the Age of Reptiles, the reptiles themselves are brought forward to the Age of Humans. Manipulation of DNA acts as a reverse time machine, harnessed now to the interests of the entertainment industry. ►

Out of the tomb: a T-Rex, one of Spielberg's sexually threatening dinosaurs – close relatives of the figures in slasher movies

Strange sights (from left to right): an iguanodon, from 'Illustrated London News'; 'King Kong'; 'The Lost World'; 'The Birds'; 'Jurassic Park'



◀ Dinosaurs, in fact, have become commodities, fetishised attractions in the Society of the Spectacle. At the same time, they are like the prisoners in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a prison in which every prisoner could be ceaselessly observed from a single vantage point. Michel Foucault, in his classic book *Discipline and Punish*, points out that the prototype for the Panopticon was the menagerie built for Louis XIV at Versailles, where all the animals could be watched by a single guard. In *Jurassic Park*, the captive monsters are observed electronically rather than optically, from a computer-driven control centre reminiscent of that for the space ship in *Star Trek*, another form of high-tech island resort. Isla Nublar hurtles through time as the *Enterprise* hurtles through space.

This island is also the isolated castle or fortified island where so many other mad scientists and mad doctors and mad sadists have held sway. Hammond, the Scottish entrepreneur played by Richard Attenborough, is another Dr Frankenstein, another Dr X, another Dr Moreau, another Dr No. Hammond has a Chinese American geneticist at his side, Dr Wu (shades of Dr Fu Manchu), who does the (ultra-hygienic) dirty work while he concentrates on the grand sweep of his vision and the construction of his crazed dream. Hammond's dream does not have to be concealed from prying eyes: he is not afraid of being exposed and lynched. On the contrary, his whole purpose is to display his monsters to an adoring public. We might expect that, in the end, he would be torn to pieces by his own vengeful monsters, like Dr Moreau. Hammond, however, escapes unscathed, presumably because he is too close, in some respects, to Spielberg himself.

At a critical point in the film, Hammond muses on his early days running a flea circus in Petticoat Lane, a realm of illusion, in contrast to *Jurassic Park*, where everything is real and tangible (and can eat you). Cinema, in these terms, is only a flea circus – the humbler, safer, insubstantial first beginning of the great *Jurassic Park* dream. But the comparison between cinema and theme park is still too close for comfort, especially when we think of *Jurassic Park*'s museum shop, lovingly, and perhaps ironically, tracked around. Along with the box office, all those T-shirts and mugs and key-tags and toys are, after all, the fuel that drives both enterprises, real film and imaginary theme park. More than a hundred licensees are producing *Jurassic Park* merchandise: video games, action figures and play sets, breakfast cereal and hamburger promotions, plush toys, mag-

nets, story books, lunch boxes, pencils and, of course, a forthcoming *Jurassic Park* ride at Universal Studio's very own theme parks in California and Florida. A film about a theme park will itself end up as a theme park attraction.

It's all as if *Jurassic Park*, the film, was really designed to end up as *Jurassic Park*, the ride. The strip of film unspooling through the projector is like the single-rail automated people-mover designed to shuttle tourists safely around the park. In both cases the ride turns into a nightmare from which we will emerge safely in the end. The nightmare is caused, first, by technical breakdown, and then by breakdown of the barriers which separate the safe, 'civilised' world from the dangerous 'wild' world. Things no longer stay put in their proper place. Like the Indians who have broken out of the Western reservation or the rioting prisoners escaped from Cell Block 11, the dinosaurs tear down the fences and set out to hunt down their human prey. More uncannily, the monsters have not just run out of control, they have come back from the dead as real, living, calculating presences, confronting their human captors face to face. *Jurassic Park* is like a palaeo-zoological version of *Night of the Living Dead*, in which fearsome creatures exhumed from their fossil graves converge on the terrified humans in the resort's welcome centre. Dinosaurs, like phantoms or vampires, have come back to haunt the living – and not only to haunt them, but, of course, to hunt, trap and kill them.

Sweet and savage

All horror is based on the return of the repressed, on some metaphoric digging up of what should have stayed buried. In *Jurassic Park*, the metaphor is extended into deep time to bring back what has been buried for 65 million years, all the more potent for its long entombment. The fascination we feel for dinosaurs must be related in some way to their extinction, which troubles us. First, it makes us wonder whether we are not somehow usurpers who have taken the place which was rightfully theirs. Not that we actually did the deed, but we benefited from it and perhaps will be punished in turn for our arrogance. On another level, there are the infant's fantasies of the primal scene, of terrifying parents, now long dead but all the more able to torment us. In *Jurassic Park*, the children divide up the monsters into "meat-osauruses" and "veg-osauruses", carnivores and herbivores, in a way which is surely gender-related: the savage predators are demented father figures while the sweet-tem-

pered grazers, their prey, are beneficent mothers. One leaf-munching monster is compared to a cow; the others are obviously raging bulls. Psychiatrists tell us that another common childhood fantasy is that of saving one's parents from monstrous attackers. This too is faithfully enacted in that it is the young boy who gets the central computer system working again and thus saves all the surviving adults.

The dinosaur cult began in the nineteenth century with the identification of dinosaurs as a specific order of reptiles by the great palaeontologist Richard Owen. Owen coined the word 'dinosaur' and used it for the first time at the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, held at Plymouth in the summer of 1841. As he explained, dinosaurs had common characteristics which he deemed "sufficient grounds for establishing a distinct tribe or sub-order of Saurian Reptiles, for which I propose the name Dinosauria." Owen, however, was troubled by dinosaurs for theological rather than psychological reasons. If they were part of God's creation, what was their place in the order of things? And in what sense did they point forward to the creation of man, God's masterpiece? Above all, Owen wanted to disprove the theory of progressive evolution, put forward by Lamarck, a process which culminated in the transition from ape to man. If man was to be clearly separated from the apes, then reptiles could not be the immediate precursors of mammals but must be separate creations who reached their peak early with the majestic dinosaurs and then declined into the pathetic swarms of lizards we see today. Dinosaurs, Owen argued, were not cringing creatures creeping about on their bellies, but upstanding beasts with advanced cardiovascular systems, almost like the mammals who eventually superseded them, just as man superseded the mammals. Life progressed in uneven steps rather than in a continuous upward curve.

We know exactly how Owen envisaged dinosaurs because he had life-size models built. When the Crystal Palace was moved from Hyde Park to Sydenham, after the closing of the Great Exhibition of 1851, Owen was given the opportunity to design a series of dinosaurs to be erected on an artificial island in the Exhibition Park, each consisting of up to 30 tons of cement and iron, and still standing today. The Great Exhibition, as Michael Sorkin points out in his intriguing book *Variations on a Theme Park*, was the Ur-form of the theme park, bringing together the wealth of nations into an enclosed



palace for tourists, which “depicted paradise. Not only was it laid out like a great cathedral, with nave and transept, but it was also the largest greenhouse ever built, its interior filled with greenery as well as goods, a climate-controlled reconciliation of Arcadia and industry, a garden for machines.” At Sydenham, now under commercial management, the exhibition became an expanded leisure centre and the dinosaur replicas were one of its main attractions. The artist given the task of “revivifying the ancient world”, as he put it, was Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, who had earlier done the illustrations for Darwin’s report on the reptiles he discovered on the voyage of the *Beagle*. Hawkins is thus the direct ancestor of Stan Winston, whose studio built the models for *Jurassic Park*. Just as Winston was advised by a team of palaeontologists, so Hawkins was advised by Owen.

Spielberg and Disney

The iguanodon, then the largest known such monster, was designed as a four-legged mammal-like creature, 100 feet long and 30 feet high, reminiscent of a huge rhinoceros rather than some lowly reptile like the crocodile. To publicise the new attraction, a dinner was held on a platform inside the iguanodon, its back still open, with Owen seated at the head of the table in the dinosaur’s head. The palaeontologists and geologists who gathered in the monster’s “socially loaded stomach”, as the *Illustrated London News* reported, were there to form “the best guarantee for the severe truthfulness” of Hawkins’ work. The visitor to the dinosaurs’ island was rewarded not only by the giant iguanodon, but by a monster sloth in the act of climbing an antediluvian tree, a fearsome-looking megalosaurus, a plesiosaurus wallowing in the mud of a pool whose waters were artificially raised and lowered from three to eight feet to simulate the tide, and many other such wonders. There were tie-ins too: wall charts and small-scale models. Plainly the newly-minted dinosaur was in at the very birth of the theme park, mixing science with spectacle as ever, each Brobdignagian creature frightening the Victorian tourist “with ideas of retribution in its monstrous jaws,” as the *Illustrated London News* gloatingly observed.

Richard Owen’s main public antagonist in the battle over evolution was Thomas Huxley, who countered Owen’s near-mammal theory of the dinosaur with his own innovatory claim that the dinosaurs were birds. After he left England for America, Hawkins set about building a

new series of models, this time of bird-like dinosaurs, to be exhibited in New York’s Central Park. Unfortunately this scheme never came to fruition and the bird-dinosaurs were vandalised and destroyed. In *Jurassic Park*, however, they are back with a vengeance, running around like bloodthirsty ostriches, as Huxley had imagined.

It is appropriate that *Jurassic Park* should popularise Huxley’s belief that the dinosaurs were birds, recently revived by palaeontologists, since the film that is its own closest ancestor, I believe, is Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. In *The Birds*, as in *Jurassic Park*, a couple is formed and a bachelor learns to care for ‘wife’ and ‘family’, as a prelude, we suppose, to marriage. He learns to care by protecting them from the threat of predatory creatures which at the beginning of the story seem perfectly harmless. As Carol Clover has pointed out, *The Birds*, like *Jaws*, is a “marginal example” of the slasher film. With *The Birds* and *Jaws*, the slasher genre merges with the fantastic monster film, beaks and teeth substituting for knives or saws as instruments of savage yet intimate penetration of the flesh. With the dinosaurs, teeth are supplemented by claws, and instead of the woman victim as the focus, as in *The Birds*, it is men who are attacked and killed. In a notorious comment a propos of *The Birds*, Hitchcock gave as his guiding principle the maxim: “Punish the women!” In *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg’s motto could have been “Terrify the children!” While *The Birds*, like the classic slasher film, represents displaced, stylised rapes, *Jurassic Park* seems to represent displaced, stylised child molesting. The dinosaurs do not simply threaten, attack and kill people, they threaten to kill the most vulnerable victims – children who loved and trusted them. Thus the slasher-monster subgenre mutates again in Spielberg’s hands.

Spielberg is an undoubted auteur and his fascination and identification with children and the child’s point of view is a key characteristic of his work. Like Disney, another child-oriented auteur, Spielberg both seeks to nurture children and at the same time often threatens to terrify them. Disney’s own dinosaurs, weirdly gambolling to Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, are innocuous enough, but other Disney characters are truly terrifying. Like Spielberg, one of my earliest memories is of being taken to see *Bambi*, a film which traumatised me. Looking back, I believe I can relate my fright to other fears, engendered by the blitz and associated with the forest fire, the armed aggressors, separation from the mother, the absent father. In

Jurassic Park too the children’s fear is aggravated by being separated from their parents and then left alone to their fate. Painstakingly, in the face of repeated dinosaur attacks, a kind of safe family haven has to be created. As in other Spielberg films, there is a scientist, Dr Alan Grant, this time a palaeontologist – like the ichthyologist in *Jaws* or the archaeologist in *Indiana Jones*, but in striking contrast to the unworldly, accident-prone palaeontologist who stars in *Hawks’ Bringing up Baby*. In *Jurassic Park*, Grant becomes the heroic father figure, able to draw on his dinosaur knowledge to protect and reassure the children.

Sadistic sublime

The dinosaurs themselves also have no parents, no family life, since they have been prevented genetically from breeding. Even more significant, they are sexually ambiguous. Although they left the laboratory female, they are able to change sex and become male. Thus like Norman Bates in *Psycho*, they are of uncertain sex and also seem to displace their sexual impotence into violence, itself another major trope of the slasher genre.

We know from *Metropolis* that technology out of control is closely associated with sexuality out of control, two particularly terrifying forms of disorder. They are combined in the robot Maria, the creation of another mad scientist, the magician Rotwang. Rotwang too is determined to recreate the dead, in the form of the woman he lost to his rival, Fredersen. He loves his monster as, I believe, Hammond loves his, endlessly denying and disavowing everything in the face of ever-growing evidence of viciousness and depravity. If Dr Wu is the blandly sadistic father who fertilises the eggs and then castrates the offspring, Hammond is the enthusiastically protective mother who ignores every sign of his offspring’s monstrosity. He builds a paradise garden for his saurian children, a walled garden full of plants and trees and flowers. Paradise has become a theme park and the theme park replicates Shangri-La. But Paradise Regained quickly turns into Paradise Lost. *Jurassic Park* becomes the site of what we might call the ‘sadistic sublime’. Nursery terrors of being torn to pieces and devoured alive are magnified to saurian scale.

Perhaps Spielberg should stop and ponder the fate of his monsters. Palaeontology shows us that the spectacular blockbuster was eventually doomed, to be replaced by a swarm of tiny, marginal, low-budget creatures. *Jurassic Park* opens in the UK on 16 July

Spielberg's obsession with the relation of children and death gains a new urgency in 'Jurassic Park'. By Henry Sheehan

The fears of children

At the start of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, its hero, palaeontologist Dr Alan Grant (Sam Neill), indulges in a fantasy about killing a child. Having been pestered by a 12-year-old boy asking antagonistic questions about dinosaurs, Grant tells him what would happen if he were stalked by velociraptors, viciously clever carnivores who, according to the scientist, hunted in teams and struck by surprise. The result of an encounter with these hunters, Grant explains, would be sure death. And to make his point he pulls a wicked-looking talon from his shirt and draws it over the child's stomach, describing the fatal wounds that would be inflicted. As a final flourish the scientist informs the kid that he would still be alive as the velociraptor began to feast on him.

From the point of view of the plot, this scene is a crucial set-up for what comes later in the film, which climaxes with a pair of velociraptors, who turn out to be just as clever and vicious as advertised, hot on the trail of a couple of children. It follows a sequence set on *Jurassic Park*'s island in which a worker at the dinosaur amusement park is torn apart by a mysterious something barely contained inside a crate. But in a film in which familiar Spielberg types make only the wannest of impressions, the association of children with death stands out as an unusually stark preoccupation.

This preoccupation goes beyond the mechanics of suspense, although it certainly lends an extra edge to the threat posed by rampaging dinosaurs who suddenly find themselves free to roam and hunt on their island domain. The two most terrifying scenes in the film revolve specifically around the children's near death at the hands first of a tyrannosaurus rex and then of the velociraptors.

But these encounters also serve to play out the child-murder fantasies of Dr Grant. Grant's girlfriend, paleobotanist Dr Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern), claims laughingly that the scientist has a phobia about kids, as if it were a bachelor's tic. But the way Neill plays Grant, dark and morose, there doesn't seem anything lighthearted about his disdain for them. When he's sent on a tour of the Jurassic Park facilities with a small group that includes a couple of kids, he glowers and sulks.

Those kids are 13-year-old Lex (Ariana Richards) and nine-year-old Tim Murphy (Joseph Mazzello), the grandchildren of the park's owner, billionaire John Hammond. The wealthy businessman has hired Grant and Sattler to write a report that will assure his board of directors that the island is safe for paying customers (a lawyer for

the board is also there with another scientist, Jeff Goldblum's Ian Malcolm, to prove the opposite). As a sign of his faith in his own creation, Hammond is willing to risk the lives of his grandchildren, vouchsafing them to the care of parental stand-ins, willing Sattler and unwilling Grant.

This set-up mirrors the structure of Spielberg's first big hit, *Jaws*. There another powerful paterfamilias, the mayor of the vacation town of Amityville, had badgered his employee, the local chief of police, into opening the town's beaches to prove they are safe from shark attack. As a result, the policeman's own kids find themselves in the water when a huge, voracious great white shark goes hunting among the bathers. The subsequent voyage out to kill the beast is not just a matter of public safety but an act of expiation.

Murder fantasies

Enacted murder fantasies have occurred in previous Spielberg efforts. In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, the heroic Jones is drugged by members of an Indian death cult. He is in the process of sacrificing a female companion to the cult's deity when his sidekick, a little Chinese boy, manages to awaken him from his trance.

The dissatisfactions with family life that are implicit in *Jaws* are played out in *Doom*'s symbolic fantasy. The peripatetic Jones, the personification of male independence, has been uncomfortably saddled with an instant family in the guise of a buxom nightclub singer and an orphaned kid and has frequently voiced his wish to be rid of them. The drugging doesn't impose the all-male cult's control so much as release Jones from his self-imposed social restraints. When the drug wears off, he not only rescues his own family group, but restores several dozen others by freeing captive children from the cult's enslavement. Even *Hook*'s Peter Banning enjoys a resurgent pre-adolescence when the evil Captain Hook cooperatively kidnaps his children. The businessman is free to regress to childhood unencumbered by paternal responsibilities.

Jurassic Park doesn't probe into the source of Grant's child-hatred. He's a single man, after all, and his liaison

with fellow scientist Sattler doesn't imperil his professional status in any way. The children he meets aren't particularly obnoxious; at worst they can be accused of being chatterboxes, a condition Grant appears to accept in adults. The association of children and death is just there in *Jurassic Park*, a stubborn fact to add to the genetically manufactured dinosaurs. The film, which otherwise carefully follows the rules of dramatic logic within its fantastic plot, even violates these rules in order to pursue the theme.

For example, the presence of that first boy, the one who hears Grant's story about the velociraptors, is inexplicable. Grant is out in the middle of a desert conducting a dig with a team of scientists and university students. Why should there be a single, pestering boy along? And why in the world should Hammond, a reclusive, security-conscious billionaire, entrust his grandchildren to strangers?

They are there because Spielberg is building up to the scene where the T-Rex attacks. The build-up is frighteningly tense, anchored by the filmmaker's intimate familiarity with childhood fear. The party has been sent out in two landrovers guided by an electrically charged rail which runs down the park's main roads. When the power fails, the cars come to a halt.

The security fences lose their charge at the same instant, and it's not long before the rumble of huge footsteps ominously shakes the stalled vehicles. The sole adult with Lex and Tim – the lawyer – bolts almost immediately, sending the abandoned kids into hysteria. This notion of being left alone, that adults are untrustworthy protectors, pumps up the action that follows.

For when the T-Rex attacks – which it does with brutal ferocity – back in the other car Grant and Malcolm can only watch. Or so they tell each other. For it is motion that attracts the dinosaur's eye; he can't see a still object. Grant has all the knowledge of adulthood to justify his immobility.

The attack goes on for a long time, the better for Spielberg to lay out its details. He cuts into the scene, juxtaposing the dinosaur's teeth and the terror-stricken faces of the children again and again. The creature is relentless,

systematically tearing apart the protective layers of the car to get at the squirming meat inside. The only time Spielberg cuts away is to show Grant sitting in his car watching, or to emphasise the space between the two vehicles, close but irretrievably distant.

Grant is eventually moved to action and with the help of Malcolm manages to escape with the kids. It's an impulsive act, as obscure as the source of Grant's dislike of children, although Neill's squirming, coupled with his impassive features, does imply a deeper struggle. You could say that the rest of the film is a ritualistic enactment of Grant's penance, like the police chief's voyage in *Jaws*. Grant and the children make their way through the manufactured prehistoric wilderness and have a final climactic bout with killer dinosaurs, this time with Ellie at their side.

'Schindler's List'

But you could also say that it is the automatic playing out of a pulp plot. All the digging in the movie is for fossils, not character. With its echoes of other characters from other movies, this is the remotest crew to people a Spielberg effort.

The power of the film's coupling of children and death arises almost solely from Spielberg's obsessive invocation of it. He hasn't often pursued it from the child's perspective: the exceptions being *Empire of the Sun* and *The Color Purple*, in which inconvenient children overcome death largely by their own initiative. In a comic variation, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* features an adult child entangled in a near-fatal intrigue sparked in part by an ageing father's competition with him. But more often it's a case of the father or father figure trying to rescue a child just before it undergoes the death the father has unwittingly devised for it.

Certainly this makes Spielberg's pursuit of his *Schindler's List* project more understandable. For years the director has been trying to film Thomas Kenneally's account of a German industrialist who rescued over a thousand Jews from the Nazis, and for years people have wondered why the entertainment king wanted to tackle such a sombre project. As depicted by Kenneally, Oskar Schindler was a paternalistic figure whose tactic was to build factory camps which provided risky havens for Jews while seeming to cooperate with the Nazis. But there were moments when Schindler couldn't protect his charges from being rounded up for the death camps.

So less a sudden interest in history than a continuing obsession with fathers treading the line between life-giver and life-destroyer may motivate Spielberg's project, which he has now finished shooting. There's always been a dark, almost morbid streak in Spielberg's work that most people have overlooked in favour of its easier emotions. But here in *Jurassic Park*, a technical masterpiece and indifferent piece of drama, it's that darkness, not the light, that remains.



Suffer little children: the threatening spectre of escaped dinosaurs out to kill in 'Jurassic Park'

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What do films such as 'Indecent Proposal' and 'Carnal Crimes' have in common? Who enjoys them?
By Linda Ruth Williams

EROTIC THRILLERS AND RUDE WOMEN



Hidden connections: the down-market, straight-to-video 'Carnal Crimes', top, and high-profile blockbuster 'Indecent Proposal', above, both films with unhappy women at their core

Although *Indecent Proposal* may look like the game of *Scruples* with a budget, its source is a maligned straight-to-video genre which is big business at many a local store. The film which launched a thousand dinner-party conversations has lower cultural roots than those who paid to see it – but wouldn't dream of renting an 'erotic thriller' video – imagine.

When Willem Dafoe posits the possibility that it's "a crime to be a great lay", he situates *Body of Evidence* also squarely in erotic thriller territory. High or low, blockbuster or denigrated sleaze video, the genre dominates the mainstream movie and video market – despite the fact that audiences and makers of films such as *Body of Evidence*, *Basic Instinct* and *Fatal Attraction* might dispute their connection with videos such as brand leader Alexander Gregory Hippolyte's *Night Rhythms*, *Carnal Crimes* and *Secret Games*.

On video, erotic thrillers are basic stories of sexual intrigue that use some form of criminality or duplicity as the flimsy framework to support on-screen sex which is as explicit as possible. Despite the popular image of the erotic thriller as a blanket term for unchallenging sleaze, as with any other genre there are good erotic thrillers and bad ones. Certainly some of these films are simply feebly acted 90s exploitation movies which fail to do anything interesting with the sex, but others are thematically, as well as sexually, provocative.

The classic opening narrative runs thus: a neglected wife, some years into her lousy marriage, is advised by her female friend to find satisfaction with some new blood. Early scenes in which wives fail to get their husbands to come to bed are legion: the resolutely down-market *Carnal Crimes* and *Secret Games* both boast key scenes of pleading in underwear, while even the relatively chaste blockbuster *Indecent Proposal* demonstrates its kinship to the video genre when Demi Moore places the hand of her scribbling husband on her breast, only to have him remove it so he can get on with his work. Viewers in the know will spot this gesture as the first step on the slippery slope towards erotic thriller infidelity, and the perils as well as the pleasures of sex.

Without making radical claims for these movies, their primary brief generally ensures that there is something interesting to watch, since they explore danger and sex in a format which is both thriller and skin-flick, often figuring a female protagonist who herself combines the roles of sexual interest, enraged victim and vigilante-survivor. The film noir seductress with a pearl-handled revolver is succeeded in the erotic thriller by the Beverly Hills housewife with an appetite for sexual danger or the 90s adventuress with a way with candlewax and a damn good lawyer. These are women who bring their handcuffs with them and use their charge cards only on designer lingerie – the low-budget daughters of Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat*, itself a reworking of *Double Indemnity*, perhaps the grandmother of all erotic thrillers.

While *Basic Instinct* was frequently compared to *Jagged Edge*, also written by Joe Eszterhas, an even less flattering parallel could be drawn with a number of more disreputable films. Sharon Stone as Catherine Tramell is only a more expensive version of erotic thriller video queen Delia Sheppard, who as Bridget the avenging lesbian of *Night Rhythms* at least sticks to her sexuality

and refuses to be swayed by the charms of the first man to cross her path. *Basic Instinct* is surely Jag Mundhra's *The Other Woman* in reverse: instead of the cop falling for the wrong woman and in the process persuading her away from lesbianism, *The Other Woman* presents the more intriguing possibility of a heroine turning away from heterosexuality to another woman, challenging the notion that all she ever needed to put her on the right track was a good heterosexual seeing to (the message of *Basic Instinct*).

From their titles alone it would be hard to tell erotic thrillers apart, though this is as true of the blockbusters as of the straight-to-video releases. Almost all of them marry two shocking words in a single come-on message, and there is a sense that any of these words could be remixed into a new combination. The erotic words tend to be adjectives, adding sexual emphasis to the nouns: instincts are basic, crimes are carnal, proposals are indecent, intent is sexual. But this can easily be reversed, for just as dark thoughts are sexy, so is sex deadly, attraction fatal.

Yet although both are animated by explicit sex and criminal thrills, the blockbuster erotic thriller, with its high production values, massive budgets and stars who can open a movie, has a racy prestige which its video sister never gains, for all the desperately classy aspirations of its *mise en scène*. This perception of video erotic thrillers as the poor cousins of the films made for theatrical release is based partly on a general privileging of theatrically released films over straight-to-video works, a distinction enforced by the Video Recordings Act. Private viewing does of course change the nature of a film, and it is true that video erotic thrillers set out to be sexually stimulating. And in that they operate with a constant awareness of masturbation as a prime audience response and index of the film's success, video erotic thrillers are able to flirt openly with pornography.

Stealing the plots

The Video Recordings Act of 1984, introduced during a wave of panic about "private home viewing", was the first piece of British legislation to consider the criterion of "suitability for viewing in the home". What this has meant is that video certification – taking into account the medium's capacity for repeated viewings and freeze-framing – tends to be more draconian than cinematic certification, a trend that runs contrary to the persistent notion that sex films made specifically for viewing within the home must be riskier, more offensive and more sexist than anything which could show at your local cinema. Backing up this notion is one particular feminist line on pornography – that the further away from the mainstream (in cinema or magazines) sexually explicit material gets, the more pernicious to women it becomes. While it is true that many straight-to-video films have been released with their sexual riskiness intact, sexiness is not an index of sexism. Since their *raison d'être* is to stimulate, video erotic thrillers do of course sail closer to the wind of censorship than films such as *Indecent Proposal*, which was released in Britain with a 15 certificate (raising the question of what happens to a film which has its generic origins in pornography when you take the pornography out). If the video erotic thriller is 'harder', this is because it represents

not only the passive women of 'softer', mainstream movies, but more explicit sex and male bodies in equal measure, as well as sexually aggressive women. Stealing the plots of their poor relations, cleansing them of any residual feminism and some of their raw, 'deviant' moments, what the blockbusters have done is to engage in a series of anodyne remakes, sanding down the revealing rough edges.

All of which suggests that there might be something interesting going on for women in a genre which seems marketed primarily for the male heterosexual eye. In a recent BBC Radio 5 interview, Dave Lewis of Medusa films called these "good-quality B movies - B for beer, biriani and bonking" which would appeal primarily to "young guys aged between 18 and 30". He added, however, that "these are films that look at sex from a woman's angle", and it is true that the pleasures for women here are substantial, and not simply because of the videos' willingness to represent in liberal doses good old-fashioned values such as strong female characters, female friendship, and women being articulate about their desires and finding fulfilment without necessarily selling their sisters out.

The discourse of male ownership, for instance, permeates the fabric of both *Secret Games* and *Indecent Proposal*, but it is arguably only the former which challenges it. Where Julianne, heroine of *Secret Games*, independently capitalises on her role as her ghastly husband's prize possession by selling herself in a ritzy brothel (and enjoying it too), Demi Moore's Diana in *Indecent Proposal* is traded from husband to lover, protesting that she did it for her husband and that she could not make the decision alone. Women in both films might go back to where they 'belong' in the end, but only the video version presents the man who says "You're for sale - and I'm going to buy you" as dangerously objectionable. "You collect things, don't you?" asks Demi Moore of Robert Redford as she is herself acquired, but Redford emerges as a benign figure who, having "collected" her, lets her go; *Secret Games'* Eric, on the other hand, is finally defeated by a group of women working together.

The men in the videos are generally unequivocally despicable, their threat to the heroines laying bare the oppositional nature of relations between the sexes and the danger as well as the desirability of men. Sex is both the answer to and the cause of women's problems, and in presenting sexual relations as threat as well as indulgence, erotic thrillers, for all their glossy post-feminism, are still dramatising a battle in the sex war. There is little fudging the issue by presenting men - as do the blockbusters - who are nothing worse than likeably confused, misguided or blinded by desire (Michael Douglas in *Basic Instinct*, William Hurt in *Body Heat*, or Willem Dafoe in *Body of Evidence*). The husbands in the videos are at best unpleasantly indifferent to their women, at worse aggressive, while male lovers are frequently murderous. In *Carnal Crimes* the heroine's vile husband and feckless lover enter into a pact against her; in Kurt MacCarley's *Sexual Intent*, the tale of a villain who systematically defrauds women is spliced with a series of candid straight-to-camera accounts by ordinary women elaborating with personal relish on the 'all men are bastards' theme (Madonna's line in *Body of Evidence*, "I never know why men lie - they

just do" is the faint, mainstream echo of many of the videos' angrier voices). It is easy to see the pleasures for women in *Sexual Intent*, not only from the vox pop testimonies, but as it turns from erotic thriller to rape-revenge narrative, when three of the women overcome their sexual rivalry to get together, round up the villain and shoot him, only so a fourth can run him over. Even the less appealing *Carnal Crimes* has its revengeful heroine redistribute her husband's money to the servants.

Sex and death

This is not to say that the simple presentation of men as villains constitutes a feminist move, even in tandem with a barrage of soft-feminist points. But neither could it be said that these are unambiguously misogynistic films; the suspenders may be manifold, the camera may frequently linger on the perfect Californian female body, but this is not the whole story. Indeed, in films which are so overtly directed towards male heterosexual desire, the narrative attack on masculinity presents something of a problem; the patterns of identification for male and female viewer are far from simple.

The fact that erotic thrillers are so resoundingly ideologically confused, and that they wear this confusion on their sleeves in a way the blockbusters don't, facilitates other pleasures than those for which they were overtly designed. A scene in *Secret Games*, for instance, in which a group of women discuss the inadequacy of men ("Women are more considerate," says one, while another protests that "Men don't know what women want") takes place as the women lounge topless around a swimming pool: the sexualised bodies and women-only talk suggests male-fantasised lesbianism, but the talk itself takes the scene elsewhere. Earlier, three women offer a characteristically male-oriented voyeuristic spectacle by trying on their raunchiest underwear in front of each other - but on the whole, the scene combines the pleasures of shopping with the pleasures of sex in an atmosphere that is part tupperware party, part orgy. Add to this confusion of signals a large helping of self-parody and something rather surprising is taking place. For example, Leon Ichaso's *Those Bedroom Eyes*, a non-explicit made-for-television film (the steamy saxophone apparently making up for the lack of steamy sex), cuts from the shooting of a man in a torrent of jacuzzi foam to a train going into a tunnel, in a film whose hero is a psychology lecturer with a cat called Freud.

If husbands are neglectful, best friends - in the video films at least - are indulgent. This is another key difference: in the 'lower' films women have buddies who look out for them, but not so the blockbusters: Demi Moore in *Indecent Proposal* can share her moral dilemma with no one, while *Body of Evidence* pits all three women (Madonna, Dafoe's wife, and Anne Archer replaying her *Fatal Attraction* role as the now faithful secretary) completely against each other in a triangle of hate. In *Fatal Attraction* the solitary Glenn Close character is notoriously dispatched by Archer as righteous wife, and while in *Basic Instinct* Sharon Stone's Catherine Tramell is seen with a number of women of all ages, she hardly inspires affection. The videos tell a different story - loyalty and the benefits of sexual healing are central to the lore which circulates between

female friends in these films; here it is women's role to prescribe a sexual cure for the ills of marriage. Beyond the point that this is, of course, the justification for the heroine's subsequent strip and every sex scene in the film, the women are at least doing it for themselves rather than being swayed by sexual pressure from the first toy-boy who shows interest or kindness. Elise's best friend in *Carnal Crimes* encourages her affair and dismisses all guilt, while the distinctly unglamorous heroine of *Sexual Intent*, battered wife June, is told by her friend Kath "sometimes you just have to go for it - listen to your gut for a change." In the move from 'low' video to 'high' blockbuster, such female friends are lost.

The worst that can be said about this woman-to-woman remedy is that it ignores the post-*Female Eunuch* arguments against sexual liberation as a lifestyle, not to say political, cure-all. This is slick sex as therapy for social ennui, a silicone sexual revolution as prescribed by the Beverly Hills sisterhood in which you can have free love as well as the face lifts. Most of the women do finally stick with their marriages: marriage does, after all, bring significant fringe benefits, in particular the pleasures of conspicuous consumption. In this, *Indecent Proposal* is something of a departure, since Demi Moore opts for love's sake for husband and poverty rather than the paying stranger.

Compared to their low-budget, straight-to-video sisters, the women of the blockbusters have little obvious appeal for women in the audience, as the gut response of many women to *Basic Instinct* demonstrates. Here sex-as-crime enjoyed for its pervier pleasures is disavowed by a final message which condemns it - the return of family values, of wife to husband, the death of the harpy: in *Fatal Attraction*, *Body of Evidence*, *Indecent Proposal*, *Final Analysis*, you name it. The point isn't, as J. Hoberman has written in *Sight and Sound*, that the women-as-designer-sex-toys who populate the blockbusters have unexpectedly turned nasty: the shock of the icepick isn't the shock of a woman taking up arms, it's that someone has bothered to lay out their fantasy of female sadism made in the image of male masochism so explicitly and expensively while pretending it's something else. Women who kill in the blockbusters do so as part of the oiliest designer fantasy; men might die beyond the little death, but the women's powers are hardly self-appointed.

It is left to the cheaper movies to explore more fully a woman's view of the kill, and her motives. At least the lower-budget women get good sex as well as the pleasures of the feminist vigilante. At least they can shoot the buggers honestly and for their own reasons, without finding that, after all, they were only playing out the active role in his last fantasy.

My objection to this streak in the glossies isn't that a particularly narrow mode of male sadism is having it out on the screen, but that it's pretending to be something else, something smarter and less 'deviant' (not so the low-budgets, which if they want to show forms of sadomasochism from one side or the other or indulge in any variety of gratuitous 'perversions' will do so). The ponderous sadomasochism of *Body of Evidence*, so desperate to shock, entirely lacks the routine nonchalance of the numerous scenes of three-way sex, voyeurism and domi- ►

In 'Basic Instinct', the spectacle of Tramell and her psycho girlfriend becomes that of a pair of entwined Playmates of the month

◀ nation to be found in the videos. The heroine of *Carnal Crimes* is initiated into infidelity as she drips blood from her wounded arm on to another woman, while a man – the film's 'purveyor of perversions' – takes pictures; the glamorous female shrink in *Sexual Intent* masturbates to the videos of testifying women. Before their own lesbian encounter in *The Other Woman*, Jessica watches a man pouring milk over Traci's breasts; the madame of the high-class brothel of *Secret Games* masturbates to the remote-camera images of her girls getting it on. The spectacle of female pleasure, particularly pleasure which excludes men, is central. There is little moral gloss, and women are seldom the villains, and even less often the villains by simple virtue of their sexuality.

Erotic thrillers may almost have done away with the *femme fatale*, but this doesn't stop their women from being unsettlingly exciting. However audacious they are, they don't get punished for it, and having enjoyed the sex they can then switch roles as the films slip genres and the women take their revenge. Compare this to the familiar track record of the blockbusters: Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* is dispatched in perhaps the most notorious female death in 80s cinema; in *Body of Evidence*, Madonna is put on trial, shot and then drowned. If *Fatal Attraction* had gone straight to video, avoiding the infamous preview screenings at which audiences, enraged by the original suicide ending, shouted "Kill the bitch", the Close character may have escaped. Only the incredibly pernicious conclusion of *Night Rhythms* gets close to blockbuster punishment, as Bridget is carted off to prison with Nick accusing her not only of killing her lover Honey, but of being lousy in bed, a frustrated dyke and an ambitious career woman who has stolen his radio show.

Lesbianism is a central concern of these films, and its representation raises the question of female response both within the narrative and for women in the audience. Susie Bright, one-time editor of American lesbian porn magazine *On Our Backs*, has made the point that the sexual imagination is adept at appropriating material from a variety of sources, and that lesbians have long used male heterosexual porn, viewing against the grain of the text's heterosexual message to find other pleasures through it, including those provided by the stock images of lesbian sex that appear in all these films. While none of these films could unproblematically be called lesbian porn – even though at least one such sex scene seems obligatory in each of them – this is not to say that lesbians cannot enjoy watching them, or that the actresses involved did not enjoy what they were doing. But the values and images of the Hippolyte stable, not to say the 'higher' lesbianism of *Basic Instinct*, are nevertheless a far cry from the lesbian porn marketed specifically for women, using lesbian models, photographers and editorial staff, to be found in *On Our Backs* or British magazine *Quim*.

Indeed, Catherine Tramell and her video sisters, the designer dykes of the raunchier erotic thrillers, are not so much bisexual as hetero-lesbian, putting their lesbianism on show not, apparently, for their own pleasure but as a foreplay spectacle for the eyes of a man – or, in the case of *Basic Instinct*, as the primary weapon of heterosexual enticement. In this capacity,

Tramell is fashioned by the sharpest misogynist knife (or icepick), as she manages to alienate other women not only by virtue of her indifference to them as sexual partners the minute Michael Douglas' cop waves his magic wand, but by her use of them to appear more alluring to him in the first place. In this light, the spectacle of Tramell and her psycho girlfriend becomes that of a pair of entwined Playmates of the month – maybe a bit murderous, but still looking fixedly into the male eye which is in the end more interesting.

If lesbianism, which ought to threaten and revolt men because it excludes them, is a come-on, then so is the possibility of murder, which ought to invoke an even stronger reaction in its threat to do away with them altogether. Yet here female murderousness is a partner in crime with hetero-lesbianism; male sexual exclusion becomes the most exciting possible thing, as does the risk of annihilation. In both cases the male sexual role is more central the greater the risk he takes, the more sexually and fatally threatened he is. The less a man seems to be needed in the sex scenes of these films, the more sure you can be that the whole thing is being played out for his benefit. When a character such as Stone's turns to women as she is turning on men, she may suggest the possibility of the man being done away with altogether; but this is a stylised ritual of taboo-breaking at which erotic thrillers are adept. Madonna's body-as-murder-weapon – "no different from a gun or a knife" – is precisely what Willem Dafoe wants, even though, or perhaps because, he risks being its victim.

The rough incoherence of the videos – smoothed out to some extent in the blockbusters – facilitates a number of other readings. Susie Bright has written in celebration of dyke daddies, "lesbian-identified men" who "don't want to save the lesbians" (by giving them a bit of what they're really after), "they want to be the lesbians." Heterosexual response is obviously not as straightforward as we might like to think, with a range of subversive cross-identifications going on in the pornographic scenario of the video erotic thriller, for women as well as for men. It is this contradictory transgression of conventions that makes the video erotic thriller a more engaging prospect than its anodyne, high-budget counterpart.

Scratch the surface

"Today's 'meat movie' is tomorrow's blockbuster", writes Carol Clover in *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, which highlights a key relationship between low-budget, rough-edged 'nasties' and high-profile, high-budget glossy shocker-thrillers: "Scratch the glossy surface of *Silence of the Lambs* and you have a slasher film... Scratch *Pacific Heights* and you are in an economy of bloodsucking that looks like nothing so much as a vampire film." Video erotic thrillers are equally the disavowed but influential underbelly of the current spate of sexy blockbusters. Scratch the surface of *Basic Instinct* and you have a straight-to-video erotic thriller with a bigger budget, while *Indecent Proposal* looks rather like *Secret Games* with most of the sex taken out. The soundtrack might tell us that this is "no ordinary love" as Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson fuck on their bed of money, but it is the love that erotic thrillers are made of.



Femmes fatales: women are perceived as threatening to men in 'Body of Evidence', top, or by excluding them altogether as in the lesbian sex of the popular 'Secret Games', above

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The rock music scene,
'The Puppetmaster',
'Beijing Bastards' and the
Hong Kong festival: Tony
Rayns reports from China

DREAM ON

● The best rock band I saw in Beijing this spring was Xuewei, whose name means 'Acupuncture Point'. They came on towards midnight on a Thursday evening at a 'rock party' in a shopping mall on the city's third ring road. Their vehement lead vocals were in English (the singer, I was told, is half-Chinese, half-Dutch) and they played loud, hard rock with more rhythmic and melodic complexity than most of the audience could handle. I liked their mismatched but all-in-black dress and loved their sound as much as anything I've heard since I caught Talking Heads at their London debut, supporting the Ramones at the Roundhouse. Xuewei's stuff isn't even on underground tapes yet, let alone on sale in the music stores; hard to say if they'll hold it together until the right A&R scout happens along.

A week earlier, I'd sat through a concert by Hei Bao ('Black Panther') at the Capital Stadium, surrounded by students dutifully clapping and waving lighters above their heads. Hei Bao seemed like an interesting band a few years ago, but they've turned into China's answer to Bon Jovi: tight trousers, hair down to their nipples and endless macho posturing. Rock concerts on this scale (the stadium holds around 10,000) still require a pretext in the People's Republic, so Hei Bao dedicated the evening to an old people's charity and interrupted the set to hand over a cheque to a group of waiting suits. The SRO crowd clapped, but otherwise behaved exactly as the equivalent western audience would have done.

Although it's interesting to speculate why

China's cities have developed such a varied and deep-rooted rock scene when Hong Kong and Taiwan – far more open to western influences for far longer – have not, the most exciting thing about Beijing's burgeoning sub-culture is that it now includes film- and video-makers. Zhang Yuan's *Mama* demonstrated two years ago that it was possible to make a 35mm movie entirely outside the state studio system, and Zhang went on to cement a link between independent film-making and the rock music scene by making three excellent music videos for Cui Jian, China's rock pioneer and still the scene's most considerable presence. Now Zhang is in the final stages of post-production with his second feature *Beijing Bastards* (*Beijing Zazhong*), which is about kids in and on the fringes of the rock scene. And three other young directors without jobs in the state film industry have recently finished no-budget independent features, while a growing number of directors from television are turning freelance to make documentaries on video.

All of this new work stands apart from earlier Chinese norms. Documentary tapes like Wen Pulin and Duan Jinchuan's *The Sacred Site of Asceticism* (*mChims-phu*, about a Buddhist retreat in Tibet), the SWYC Group's *I Graduated!* (*Wo Biyele*, about the fate of the generation that occupied Tiananmen Square) and Wu Wenguang's 1966: *My Time in the Red Guards* (1966: *Wo de Hongweibing Shidai*, picking over memories of the Cultural Revolution) – all of them screened in this year's Hong Kong Film Festival but so far unseen in China – are utterly unlike what passes for documentary on Chinese television, not only in their choice of subjects but also in their questioning and committedly personal angles of approach.

Similarly, the independently made features have next to nothing in common with mainstream movies from the state studios, nor with the kind of foreign-financed co-productions that have kept 'Fifth Generation' directors such as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang in business in recent years. Since they were made on shoestrings, the independent features naturally look and sound different from other Chinese movies. But it's their underlying attitude that makes them truly distinct. They express feelings about urban society, sex, mental health, music and dreams that have never found their way into Chinese films before – no doubt because older directors have had other priorities and other issues on their minds. These new films are obviously as varied as the directors who made them, but they all share an idiosyncratic mixture of anger and blankness, in most cases spiked with a black, cynical humour.

Not exactly a rock film

Beijing Bastards stars Cui Jian (also credited as one of four producers and one of three writers) and shows quite a bit of music in performance, but it's not exactly a rock film. Zhang Yuan is less interested in the music as such than in the bearing it has on the lives of the young people who use it as their soundtrack. The film loosely interweaves the comings, goings and minor crises of five main characters; the song and con-

cert sequences are used to define tone and mood and sometimes to provide narrative context. The structure is deliberately episodic and rambling, and some of the scenes in which people get drunk, kill time or pick fights play like open-ended, Cassavetes-style improvisations. But one broken relationship gives the film its overall frame: a young man (played by the 23-year-old Li Wei, a real-life rock promoter) spends the film looking for the pregnant girlfriend who has left him and botching his approaches to potential new girlfriends. Completely unpretentious, the film finally coheres into a detailed and incisive sketch of youthful doubts and frustrations, only some of which are particular to present-day Beijing.

Two of the other independent features form an involuntary diptych, partly because both are formally composed and shot in monochrome, but also because both worry away at precise emotional insecurities and feelings of inadequacy. Wang Xiaoshuai's *Days* (*Dong-Chun de Rizi*, which I was able to see only in a silent rough-cut) chronicles the decline and collapse of a marriage. A painter and his wife (played by Liu Xiaodong and Yu Hong, real-life stars of the Beijing art world) are trapped in a grinding domestic routine and – like many self-employed artists in China – worn down by the pressures of living outside the state system. They try to pick themselves up by taking a trip to Manchuria, the wife's birthplace, only to find a chasm opening up between them. On the evidence of the rough-cut, Wang (who was the outstanding talent in the directing class that graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 1989) brings a clear, poetic eye to his gloomy subject. The film has the air of a dream shading into nightmare, but the tone is more elegiac than miserabilist.

He Yi is the *nom de cinéma* of He Jianjun, a more recent survivor of the Film Academy who worked as assistant director to Tian Zhuangzhuang on *The Blue Kite* before making his own first film. *Xuan Lian* (the title means something like 'Uncertain Love') is an extended reverie: while waiting for his girlfriend in a noisy restaurant, a pale young man (Liu Jiang, actually trained as a cinematographer) fantasises a scenario in which he is hired as an orderly in a mental hospital and becomes obsessed with a young woman patient, gradually entering her delusions and identifying with her sickness. Open to any number of interpretations, the film is finely balanced between nightmare and black comedy. It makes grimly humorous play with long takes and manic patterns of repetition while pushing slowly towards its longed-for sexual encounter, achieving a genuine oneiric charge along the way.

Wu Di's *The Goldfish* (*Huangjin Yu*) is the flipside of this diptych, in that it's framed as jaunty comedy-drama but shot through with similar emotional and sexual anxieties. The premise resembles Alain Tanner's *Le Retour d'Afrique*: a personable but unassertive guy and his go-getter girlfriend plan to emigrate to the US, but he chickens out at the airport; the couple then spend weeks hiding from their relatives and friends in a rented room in the countryside, during which time their relation-



Intimate stories:
Li Tianlu, raconteur of
'The Puppetmaster', above;
Wu Di (centre), shooting
his jaunty comedy-drama
'The Goldfish', below

ship falls to pieces. Like Zhang Yimou and Zhang Yuan, Wu is a cinematographer turned director; he shot part of Ning Ying's *For Fun* and helped out on Wang Xiaoshuai's *Days*. His film has a cheerful ebullience that ought to earn it wide distribution in China. As I write, though, word comes from Beijing that it went down badly at a screening for cinema bookers, who found it lacking in violence and other exploitable features.

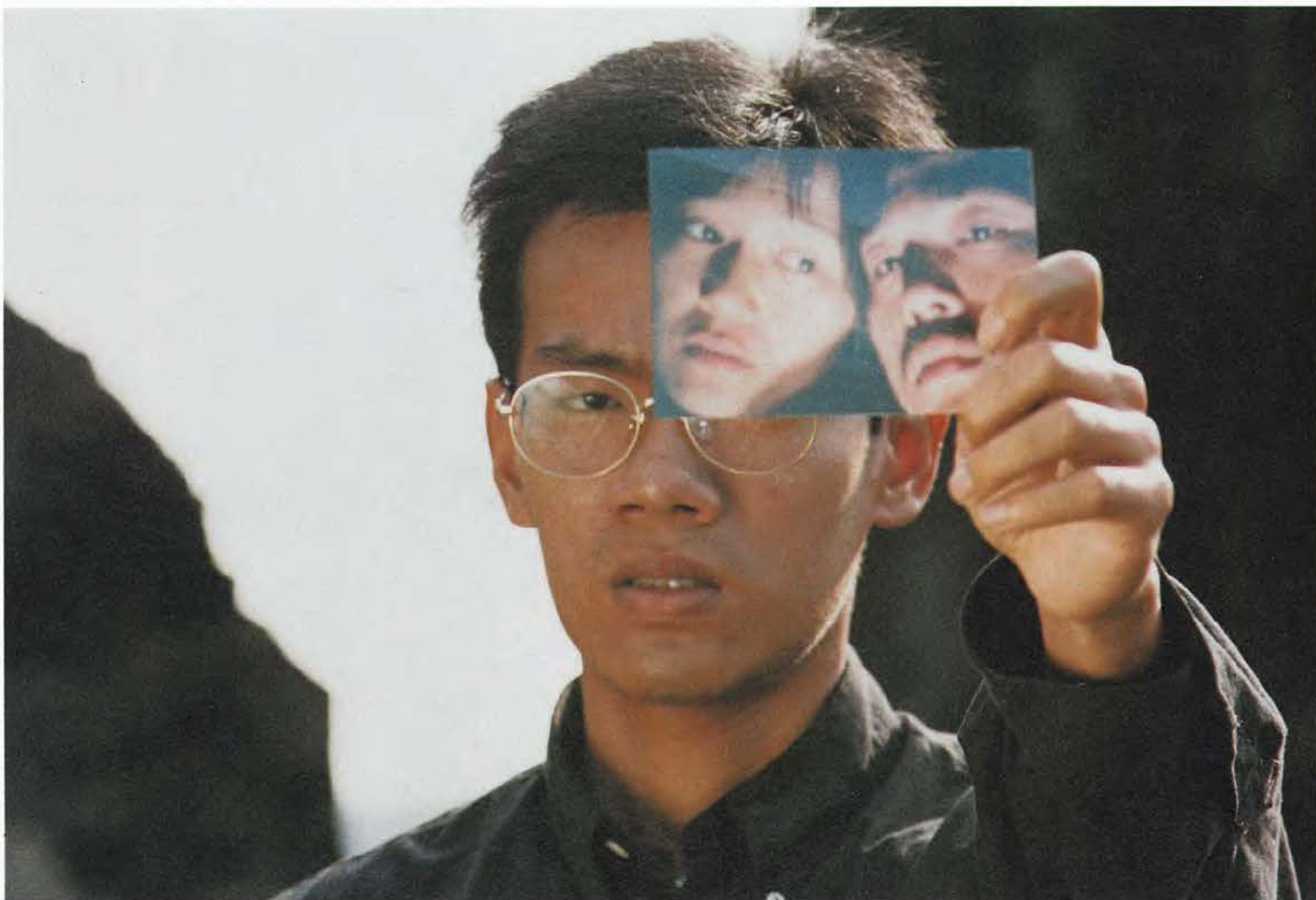
Cinema bookers are revelling in new-found power and responsibility in China, thanks to the latest round of film industry 'reforms'. China Film Corporation has just lost its monopolies in domestic distribution and the foreign sale of Chinese films; the studios themselves are now entitled to distribute their own productions and to sell them abroad – although none of them currently has the linguistic or business competence to tackle the global market. Zhang Xingyuan, chief of the Foreign Affairs department of the government's Film Bureau, explained to me that these changes were designed to force the studios into a keener awareness of their markets at home and abroad; he didn't need to add that they were prompted by the literal bankruptcy of the old system. The Film Bureau will inevitably retain overall ideological control of Chinese cinema and will go on supervising China's participation in international film festivals, and Zhang Xingyuan envisages that most foreign sales will still be negotiated through the Film Corporation. The demoralised staff of the Film Corporation, however, see things differently. They plan

to close down their English-language magazine *China Screen* when the current contract with the printer runs out, and are exploring the possibility of setting up a new line of business as an advertising agency.

Shock waves

The Film Bureau's difficulty, it seems to me, is that the Chinese films most likely to be of interest to audiences around the world are going to be those from the co-production and independent sectors, not from the old-established studios. In the last six months, China's 14 major studios have come up with precisely two features capable of holding their own on the international stage: Xie Fei's *Women from the Lake of Scented Souls* (*Xianghun Nü*, which shared the Golden Bear in Berlin) and Huang Jianxin's new satirical comedy about economic reforms *Stand Up, Don't Bend Over* (*Zhanzhiluo, Bie Paxia*, premiered at the Hong Kong festival). The two Mainland Chinese movies that went down so well at this year's Cannes Film Festival were both financed from Hong Kong: Chen Kaige's *Farewell to My Concubine* (*Bawang Bie Ji*) and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (*Lan Fengzheng*). Although Chen's romantic epic won him a long overdue Palme d'Or, China felt so little proprietorial interest in the film that it didn't even send an official delegation to the festival. The appearance of Tian's film, on the other hand, provoked shock waves in Beijing because it is officially banned and Tian was refused permission to go to Tokyo to supervise its post-production. The sales agent in Cannes received ►





◀ an agitated phonecall at 5am from Cheng Zhigu, head of Beijing Film Studio, asking if it was true that *The Blue Kite* was being screened secretly at the festival. When he replied "No, not true, it's being screened openly," Cheng brought the conversation to a rapid close.

The Blue Kite was one of the few hits in the Cannes market this year; it was sold for distribution in many countries (including Britain), an achievement unlikely to be matched by this year's *echt*-Hong Kong movies, to judge by those screened at the Hong Kong festival in April. As 1997 draws closer and worries about the future under China's sovereignty harden into concrete fears, Hong Kong film-makers are spending more and more time harking back to the comforting certainties of the past. Tsui Hark's Film Workshop, which since the mid-80s has done little but revive and update old genre movies, is now devoting most of its resources to two ongoing series: *Once Upon a Time in China III* (Huang Feihong zhi San: Shiwang Zhengba, directed by Tsui himself) rehashes the allegorical conceits of its two predecessors before turning into a blatant remake of Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956 version, of course) at its climax, while *Swordsman III* (Dongfang Bu Bai zhi Fengyun Zai Qi, produced by Tsui and directed by Ching Siu-Tung and Raymond Lee) tries to wring blood from the stone of a feeble political satire on true and false leadership. Last year's surprise success was Joe Chan's *92 Legendary La Rose Noire* (92 Hei Meigui dui Hei Meigui), a camp pastiche of Cantonese superhero/crimebuster movies of the 60s. Even Jacob Cheung's *Cageman*

(Longmin), which swept the board at the Hong Kong Film Awards, is an unacknowledged remake/revision of the 20-year-old hit *House of 72 Tenants* – and it's no less evasively sentimental than the old film in resolving intractable housing problems, either. Hong Kong's current dreams, in short, are nostalgic going on stale.

Ambiguity and mystery

Thanks to its star system, its level of technical expertise and its boundless self-confidence, there is no immediate danger of the Hong Kong film industry losing its dominance of the Pacific-Asian market. In Taiwan, where the film industry came close to rolling over and dying as imports from Hong Kong stole its audience, things are paradoxically much livelier. Hou Xiaoxian has finally completed his long-delayed *The Puppetmaster* (Ximeng Rensheng) and – to the surprise of his enemies in the Taiwan press – has a Cannes Jury Prize to show for it. The film suffers from being hyped as an epic-scale account of Taiwanese history in the years under Japanese occupation; it is, in fact, a small and intimate film, narrowly focused on familial and domestic matters, that uses its protagonist's profession as leader of a traditional puppet theatre troupe as the key to otherwise elusive aspects of Chinese philosophy and folk culture. It's based on the autobiography of Li Tianlu, who has appeared as a patriarch in Hou's last three films, and Li himself contributes his inimitable skills as a raconteur, first on the soundtrack and then on camera. Hou shoots much of it in extended takes from

fixed angles, allowing the eye to explore the images and the mind to explore the weight and meaning of events as they are revealed through minutiae of dialogue, gesture and movement. Some viewers in Cannes, presumably needing something more assertive, walked out; others, like me, found it the most deeply engrossing film of the festival and stayed to weep at its beauty. I guess general audiences will divide much the same way.

Coming so soon after *The Peach Blossom Land* and *Rebels of the Neon God*, *The Puppetmaster* suggests that Taiwan cinema is on something of a roll. I spent a week in Taipei in May, meeting directors and viewing new and nearly completed films, and came away exhilarated. Edward Yang is busy shooting his comedy (now called *The Confucian Confusion*) and is confident that it's his best work to date. Tsai Ming-Liang, still high on the success of *Rebels of the Neon God* in Berlin, is rewriting the script for his second feature, to be shot in the summer. And Huang Mingchuan, whose haunting debut feature *The Man from Island West* pioneered genuinely independent production in Taiwan, has nearly finished editing his follow-up *Bodo* (Baodao Dameng), financed almost entirely from his own earnings as a director of commercials – a profession he now hopes he has left behind. I saw an hour of the *Bodo* rough-cut and found it extraordinary: a dreamy ghost story about the army and military deserters that wavers between realism and the surreal. (Taiwan, of course, is still technically at war with China, and males are still required to do two years'



Wavering between worlds: 'Bodo', a dreamy ghost story about the army and military deserters. Huang Jichi, opposite; the pain of entrapment, above; director Huang Mingchuan and actor Shi Nanhua, below

military service – an obligation that some try to evade and others desert from.) Huang's careful, often painterly images and the constant subtle changes of register reflect the film's conditions of production: a small, self-sufficient unit with crew members sometimes doubling as cast, no interfering producer, no priority but to make the best film possible. Neither side knows it, but Huang Mingchuan has much in common with independents like Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai in Beijing.

Two of the new features I saw in Taipei will certainly attract attention when they enter the festival circuit later this year. 18, by the US-trained He Ping, is an all-night rave of a movie: a disquieting anti-bourgeois satire that winds up closer to existentialism for the post-amphetamine generation. It has a one-sentence plot: a middle-aged straight on a summer drive in the country abandons wife and daughter when he grows obsessed by the dice game 18 as played by earthy locals who make him question his roots. But He Ping (or P'ing Ho as he writes it himself) fragments and splinters the story in a way that makes Nicolas Roeg look like Dreyer. Time is contracted and dilated, identities blur and the screen fills with ambiguities and mysteries. The film often stalls in its own visual rhetoric, but still manages to build a cumulative emotional impact. The whole is anchored in a remarkable performance by the Peking Opera actor Wu Xingguo, making his first appearance in a movie.

Yu Weiyan's *Moonlight Boy* (Yueguang Shaonian), on the other hand, has a consummate

sense of what it's doing from start to finish, and does it with some of the most lustrous chiaroscuro cinematography to reach the screen in years. The opening scenes are unnerving, even baffling, but the central conundrum soon emerges: why has a timid 13-year-old boy been roaming the streets of Taipei for 30 years without growing a day older?

Skewed romance

Without giving too much away, the answer lies in a skewed family romance: a stern, cold father, a helpless mother, a neurotic sister who became a Christian zealot, and a hapless, underachieving boy. Like several of the other new Chinese movies discussed here, this is a ghost story of a non-traditional sort that follows its own dream logic; Yu even blends live action and animation in a few sequences. Nothing seems real – except for the huge reservoir of unresolved emotional pain that blocks the characters and becomes the film's 'hidden' subject. Yu's understated work with his actors may owe something to the years he spent working with Edward Yang on *A Brighter Summer Day*, but this film is very much his own. You have to ask where film-making as rich and original as this has come from, and you have to conclude that the collapse of old film-industry orthodoxies must have something to do with it. Maybe that's one more thing that China and Taiwan have in common.

Author's thanks to Paul Clark, Shan Dongbing, Huang Mingchuan and Dongdong for various kinds of help in the writing of this article



Colin Nutley, the British director of the celebrated Swedish film 'House of Angels', talks to Philip Kemp

FACING THE SUN

● For much of last year Swedish box-office charts were headed by a Swedish-made feature, *Anglagård* (*House of Angels*). This wasn't unusual in itself: in Sweden, unlike Britain, native product often manages to hold its own against Hollywood competition. But what was remarkable was that the film was scripted and directed by an Englishman.

Colin Nutley, director of *House of Angels*, arrived in Sweden in the early 80s to work on *Annika*, a BBC children's serial about a Swedish au pair in England. Shooting in the archipelago of islands along the Baltic coast east of Stockholm, he was captivated by the physical beauty of the country. "When you spend a whole summer in a place like that, it's impossible not to fall in love with Sweden." He stayed on, married a Swedish woman and found work in Swedish television.

In 1987, having directed a series and a couple of television documentaries, Nutley made his first feature film, *Nionda Kompaniet* (*The Ninth Company*). Intentionally, it had been a cautious apprenticeship. "Sweden's a hard nut to crack. You don't just walk in telling them you've got something great for them – they'll slam the door in your face. It's like joining any kids' gang – you have to wait until they invite you, and then go through the ritual humiliations of the initiation ceremony.

The Ninth Company represented something new in Swedish cinema. Whole areas of contemporary Swedish society, Nutley felt, were neglected by its film-makers. This he ascribes partly to a prejudice in favour of period films – "They can't face up to the present, they think they've become boring" – and partly to the colossal shadow of Ingmar Bergman. "Bergman is both a gift and a disaster. He's set a standard that other film-makers feel they have to conform to. A 'good film' is expected to be heavy, black and in a period setting."

One unexplored area was the Swedish army – a mainly conscript force that hasn't fired a shot in anger since 1815. Near Nutley's home in south-west Sweden was a huge barracks packed

with expensive equipment lying idle. At the same time he was learning about the thriving black economy that flourishes beneath Sweden's respectable social-democratic surface. The two ideas came together in his mind.

In *The Ninth Company* a whirlpool of corruption gradually expands to suck in the whole local community, both military and civilian. At its centre is a conscript, Private Rosenkrantz. An unprincipled opportunist like his Shakespearean namesake, he starts by flogging off brand-new engines filched from army Volvos. As he devises ever more elaborate schemes, seemingly principled figures like the local pastor and by-the-book army officers succumb to the lure of the scam. Eventually the entire regiment is in on the act. Disaster finally strikes with – almost literally – a thunderbolt from heaven. The old Lutheran morality, it seems, isn't so readily mocked.

Nutley had taken quite a risk in choosing such a subject for his first film. Swedes might well have reacted indignantly to a portrayal of their society as avidly on the take, especially from an outsider. In the event (vindicating his view that Swedes enjoy outside criticism, provided it's witty) the movie was warmly received – even by the army, which gave its full cooperation, despite having seen the script.

The Ninth Company cost about £1 million to make, backed by the country's leading production company Svensk Filmindustri. Whether or not it recouped its cost is a moot point: Nutley claims it did, SF says not. But in any event it did well enough for the company to fund Nutley's next project, with a budget of about £1.4 million. *Black Jack* (pronounced Swedish-style Black Yak, and with no connection to the Leon Garfield novel filmed by Ken Loach) centres on the dance floors in most provincial Swedish towns, which serve as a combination of pub, bar and disco for Swedes of all ages.

Stifling provincialism

In terms of plot, *Black Jack* (1990) is the most conventional Nutley film so far: a love-triangle with the heroine, Inger, torn between predatory womaniser Tommy, the drummer of local dance band Black Jack, and Kai, a gentle Mr Nice Guy who runs the town garage and drives the band's bus on its tours. Around this routine set-up, Nutley evokes a potent mood of small-town stagnation reminiscent (except that his characters are some 15 years older) of such studies of stifling provincialism as *The Last Picture Show* or Fellini's *I Vitelloni*.

From this angle, the film's key characters aren't so much Kai or Inger as Kai's friends Lennart and Robert, one a preening cop with highlighted blonde hair and a sunbed tan, the other a store-owner drowning his self-loathing in brattish drunkenness. Both men talk constantly of "getting away" to Stockholm – yet hold back for fear the sophisticated capital will show them up as provincial nonentities, no better than their despised fellow-townfolk.

The action of *Black Jack* takes place during the Swedish midwinter, with brief pallid days hemmed in by encroaching darkness. Nutley is acutely responsive to the quality of Nordic light, and of Northern peoples' sensitivity to

the changing seasons. "In spring, you see people in Stockholm standing stock still and gazing upwards – simply enjoying the sun. In Sweden you always face the sun head on."

According to Svensk Filmindustri, *Black Jack* too lost money (again, Nutley disagrees), so the company responded coolly to the director's next project, *House of Angels*. "After two loss-makers," SF's Waldemar Bergendahl told the Swedish film journal *Chaplin*, "we weren't about to jump at a half-finished script." Part of the problem was Nutley's unorthodox approach to screenwriting. He writes his scenarios in English, without dialogue, which is improvised with the help of the cast. "I don't trust scripted dialogue – I'm always aware of actors reading lines. So I play a stealing game with my actors. I give them what they want – freedom and safety – but I take their Swedishness and use it. I work like a fast Mike Leigh."

With SF unwilling to fund the project, Nutley turned instead to the Gothenburg-based independent producer Lars Jönsson. Jönsson found the bulk of the £1.2 million budget, though he and Nutley had to put up £200,000 of their own money. The gamble paid off, with the two men owning 60 per cent of what proved to be a huge commercial success. Not that SF lost out either. The company owns most of the cinemas that played *House of Angels* and, Nutley wryly notes, has so far made some £300,000 on the film it refused to back.

The tension between the capital and the provinces, a recurrent element in Nutley's work, becomes in *House of Angels* the dominant theme. When an elderly eccentric dies, the local landowner, Axel, expects to snap up the old man's property: the farm known as the House of Angels and the estate that goes with it. But there shows up a granddaughter no one has heard of, a sexy, uninhibited young woman riding pillion on her saturnine, blackleather-clad boyfriend's Harley-Davidson.

This couple, Fanny and Zac, at once become the focus of the rural community's fascinated resentment. Sophisticated, cosmopolitan and therefore, in the eyes of the villagers, degenerate, they stand indicted on scant evidence of every possible crime. When they invite down a gang of their showbiz friends, who indulge in nothing worse than skinny-dipping and risqué songs, local indignation explodes. "She's German – she should live in Germany." "They're all drug addicts – they've destroyed the solidarity of the village." "Foreigners, the whole pack of them – our village will be ruined. We've lived here for generations. You just have to look at these people – they're shit!"

In the film's most scathing scene a group of women led by Axel's wife Ruth invade the House of Angels and berate its inhabitants, accusing them of turning the house into "a nightclub – a brothel – a whorehouse!" Next Axel's nephew, the village grocer, sets out with a load of petrol to burn the place down. He's prevented, rather too easily. The second half of *House of Angels* suffers from what feels like a loss of nerve, as though the director had backed away from the implications of his story. For once, Nutley fails to face the sun; rather than follow the logic of the plot to its violent resolu-



Modern times: Helena Bergström as Fanny, the city slicker who became the focus of local resentment in Nutley's 'House of Angels'

tion, as in *The Ninth Company*, he retreats into an anodyne scenario of reconciliation.

Even so, the film struck a chord in Sweden, being released at a time when outbreaks of xenophobia – though mild compared to those in Germany – had shaken a nation that had always seen itself as a model of enlightened tolerance. Months after its release the movie was still pulling in full houses, and it rates as the most popular and profitable Swedish film ever made. Reviewers were equally enthusiastic, but the film apparently hit resistance in certain high-cultural circles. *Chaplin*, the country's most prestigious movie journal, got through 1992 without once mentioning *House of Angels* (though it did make amends early this year with a ten-page cover feature on Nutley), and at first the Swedish Film Institute seemed reluctant to nominate the movie for awards or festivals. Attitudes changed as the film garnered international success, and it was chosen as Sweden's candidate for this year's Foreign Film Oscar – though only as a last-minute substitute when Bille August's *Den Goda Viljan* (*The Best Intentions*) was ruled ineligible.

All the same, Nutley's reputation in Sweden is now secure to the point of finding himself seen, slightly to his embarrassment, as "the most Swedish of Swedish directors. I've almost become an official person, to be consulted on my view of Sweden." All the more surprising, then, that the only British director ever to make it big on the European mainland remains virtually unknown in his home country. For most critics – including this one – the retrospective of all Nutley's Swedish features at last September's Dinard Festival came a revelation.

Seeing the three movies together, the director's personal voice, style and thematic preoccupations are unmissable. In stylistic terms his films are light on their feet, relying on a fluid camera and agile cutting to keep the narrative moving. Nutley's editing, which some Swedish critics find abrupt, he himself describes as "an English sense of cutting – making the story move in an English way." A catch-phrase shared

with his regular editor, Perry Schaffer, is "Let's get out of the scene" – cutting away fast as soon as the point is made.

Nutley's treatment of his characters is affectionate and uncensorious, wryly observing their knack of tripping over their own illusions. Often they neglect what they *are* for what they feel they *ought* to be: Kai in *Black Jack* loses Inger by confessing a wish to be more like the vulpine Tommy. And in *The Ninth Company* both the pastor and the regimental commander are angling for postings to Stockholm – an ambition which makes them all the more vulnerable to Rosenkrantz's schemes.

Outsider's gaze

This restless sense of displacement – which may well reflect Nutley's own status as a semi-assimilated outsider – often emerges in studied eccentricity. In *House of Angels* the local lawyer neglects his practice in favour of ballroom-dancing sessions with his wife; the pastor entertains the ladies' sewing circle with music-hall songs and eagerly dons dark glasses to MC a rock concert in the church. Others find less engaging distractions: Per-Ove, the grocer, obsessively devours porn videos, while his wife pursues a loveless affair with the landowner's son. Behind the amiable facade can be glimpsed melancholy and even desperation.

Perhaps in reaction to such archetypally 'Swedish' elements, Nutley sometimes lets his sympathy with his characters verge on indulgence, as in the resolution of *House of Angels*. It's a weakness he acknowledges. "You could accuse me of avoiding the dark side; I'm the sort of person who expects things to turn out all right. And that side of me has got stronger in Sweden, because here they're so obsessed with the darker aspects." His current film, *Sista Dansen* (*The Last Dance*), may signal a change of direction – a study of jealousy, it's said to be "rather more problem-oriented". Nutley in any case wants it to be different – "otherwise they'll stick a label on me."

But for such seemingly transparent and

accessible work, Nutley's films prove oddly resistant to labelling. It would be convenient to see him as a bridge between the British and Swedish cinematic traditions, but in fact links to other British film-makers are elusive. His improvisational working methods may have something in common with Mike Leigh's, but there the similarity ends: there's nothing in Nutley's work of Leigh's political animus, nor of his weakness for blunt-instrument caricature. A better parallel might be with Bill Forsyth – the warmth, the underlying melancholy, the delight in people's fantasies – but Nutley shares little of the Scotsman's wistful feyness. *Black Jack*, for example, features the traditional Swedish effigy of the Yuletide Goat. It's not hard to imagine the gleams of half-sceptical mysticism Forsyth might weave around such a pagan symbol; Nutley simply extracts comedy from Robert's boozy attempts to burn the thing down.

It's easier to find Nutley's kindred spirit in Swedish cinema, though only by reaching back beyond the high-seriousness of Bergman to the short-lived Golden Age of the silent era. Not so much to Victor Sjöström, though Nutley does share his lyrical, numinous feel for landscape. But with landscape a given, almost a cliché, of Swedish movies, he's wary of the temptation to make pretty pictures. "It's a country with great scenery and some of the most fantastic lighting cameramen in the world. But there's always a danger that the cameraman will dominate the film, if you let him. Which is why so many Swedish films are sensationally beautiful to look at, but don't say very much."

The closer affinity is with the other master of the Swedish Golden Age, Mauritz Stiller – especially the earlier Stiller of the social satires such as *Kärlek och Journalistik* (*Love and Journalism*), *Thomas Graals Bästa Film* (*Thomas Graal's Best Film*) and *Erotikon*. Stiller too was an outsider (born in Finland to Russian Jewish parents) with a quizzical perspective on his adopted country. Stiller's characters, like Nutley's, are plagued by yearnings to improve on reality, to become what they're not.

Ironically Stiller himself succumbed to the same impulse, falling prey to the two great temptations that beset successful Swedish directors: to make 'serious' costume dramas, and to go to Hollywood. Nutley – so far, at any rate – seems proof against both. He has no desire to make "films about suicide set in the nineteenth century", nor to follow Lasse Hallström and Bille August to California. "In Sweden the director has status, he gets final cut – thanks largely to people like Bergman. I think the American producer-dominated attitude would break me. Hallström and August are welcome to it."

However, Nutley has made one small concession to internationalism. *The Last Dance* is being shot in Sweden and Britain – Blackpool, to be exact. It will be interesting to see how far Colin Nutley's sensibility has become Swedified – whether he can bring the same curious, oblique outsider's gaze to bear on his homeland as on his adopted country.

'House of Angels' opens on 9 July and is reviewed on page 36 of this issue



With 'The Assassin' and 'Sommersby', US remakes of French films are in the news. But can stories be moved across cultures? By Ginette Vincendeau

HIJACKED

As *Sommersby* and *The Assassin* hit British screens in rapid succession, the issue – the 'scandal' – of Hollywood remakes of European films comes back on the agenda. Reviewers usually note that these films – and many recent others such as *The Vanishing*, *Scent of a Woman*, *Three Men and a Baby*, *Blame it on Rio*, *Cousins*, *The Woman in Red*, *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* and *Three Fugitives* – are based on European (most often French) titles, and then content themselves with pointing out that they are inferior to the originals. But remakes are interesting beyond this well-rehearsed dichotomy of Hollywood commerce versus European art. Commerce is an issue, but a more complex one than suggested by the phrase 'American imperialism', which informs most writing on the topic. Remakes also throw into relief the notion of national identity in cinema. What constitutes a story, how stars are framed and how gender is constructed all undergo considerable change as they cross the Atlantic – despite a seeming similarity of plot. Three recent Franco-American pairs – *Trois hommes et un couffin*/*Three Men and a Baby*, *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*/*Sommersby* and *Nikita*/*The Assassin* – highlight the shifting patterns and issues.

Telling a different story, differently

Studies of classical Hollywood cinema have defined one of its key characteristics as clear-cut motivation, both of causality (no loose ends) and character (good or evil). By contrast, the essence of European/French auteur cinema has been seen as ambiguity (Buñuel, Fellini, Resnais and so on). Remakes show us how much this is also true of popular genres. All three remakes mentioned above go out of their way to streamline their source material, most visibly when it comes to endings.

At the end of *Trois hommes* – after Coline Serreau's protagonists invite the baby's mother in to discuss her plight and soon find her asleep in the cot – the camera moves to a freeze frame of the little girl: a classic open ending. Leonard Nimoy's three men, by contrast, work out a practical deal with the mother and stride out confidently wheeling the pram. *Nikita*'s heroine literally vanishes at the end, leaving a cryptic note; she may have escaped, but equally she may be dead, both valid interpretations of Bob's "we're going to miss her". *The Assassin* adds a coda showing Bridget Fonda walking



Instant recognition: Nikita (Bridget Fonda) poised to kill in 'The Assassin', opposite; Jack (Richard Gere) 'returns' to his community and his wife (Jodie Foster) in 'Sommersby', above

confidently towards a brighter future, condoned by a benign Bob. *Sommersby* at first sight might seem to contradict this pattern, since the hero's identity is never visually proved, whereas in *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* the return of the 'real' Guerre means that Gérard Depardieu has to admit that he is someone else. However, *Sommersby* substitutes moral certainty for the French play on identity, as indicated by the difference in titles. "The return" of Martin Guerre alludes to both the arrival of the hero in the village after his absence, and to the return of his double at the end. By focusing on the single name *Sommersby*, the US version removes the fundamental point of the French film, the unknowability of an individual. The work of the narrative in *Sommersby* is to prove 'beyond doubt' that Jack Sommersby (whoever he may have been before) is redeemed into a true hero for his community and the audience. *Martin Guerre* overturns this belief and throws doubt on the whole story, including the validity of the audience's identification.

Thus narrative patterns may be in themselves resistant to exportation. For example the notion of the symbolic father-daughter dyad is deeply rooted in both French cinema and culture. In the 30s, remakes of French films using this narrative played down this aspect (for example *L'Équipage*, directed by Anatole Litvak in 1935 and remade by the same director as *The Woman I Love* in 1937). The resurfacing of this narrative in *Nikita*, in the relationship between Nikita and 'uncle' Bob, is erased in *The Assassin*. In the scene where Bob invents the young

woman's childhood for her lover, the American film explicitly states that Bob is hardly older than Maggie and the scene becomes one of sexual rivalry between the two men, visualised by a mock fight, whereas in the French film the young man accepts Bob's 'paternal' authority. The Depardieu comedy *Mon père ce héros*, explicitly predicated on this pattern (he pretends to be his daughter's husband to fob off a younger man), is currently being developed for a US remake; according to *Le Film français*, several US screenwriters have tried, unsuccessfully, to adapt it. One conclusion is that family narratives, far from being universal, are deeply rooted in cultural difference.

Transatlantic heroes: stars in space

Remakes also highlight crucial differences between French and US 'classical' cinemas, crystallised around the use of stars. The three pairs of films discussed here use stars of different status to different effects: *Trois hommes* and *Three Men* rely on middle-ranking performers; *Nikita* introduced a relative unknown (Anne Parillaud), while *The Assassin* uses a rising young star with a 'name' (Bridget Fonda). Only *Martin Guerre* and *Sommersby* feature top male stars: Depardieu and Richard Gere. The trend for remakes of the 80s and 90s has generally been to do without top players; however, there are indications that more emphasis is being placed on attracting a major star in initiating a remake deal, following the success of Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman*, and, presumably, Gere in *Sommersby* (Gere is also billed to feature in the remake of *Les Choses de la vie*, in the role originally taken by Michel Piccoli).

As Serge Daney once put it, Hollywood cinema inscribes its ruthless hierarchies in its relativisation of stars, a hierarchy less marked in French cinema. And indeed, while Serreau uses true ensemble playing from her three leads in *Trois hommes*, *Three Men* self-consciously grades them. The three US actors are introduced separately and by name in the jokey credit sequence, whereas Serreau's titles are superimposed over an opening party, which is shot very darkly, so that we only slowly pick out the three actors (the party in *Three Men* is lit in high-key, further distinguishing the three actors). Similarly Parillaud in *Nikita* is at first indistinguishable from the group of punks to which she belongs, whereas Fonda is almost instantly ▶

War of attrition

"The sale of the story of a French film can ruin its career abroad," wrote P. A. Harlé in 'La Cinématographie française' in 1938. Harlé put his finger on the real 'scandal' of remakes: not the aesthetic copy-cat (hundreds of Hollywood films are remakes, often of other Hollywood films), but terroristic marketing practices. He was appalled that world screens were about to be flooded with the English-speaking 'Algiers' (1938) while the original version, 'Pépé le Moko' (1937), was left on the shelf outside France. More than 50 years on, nothing has changed. As 'Variety' recently put it, "many remake deals effectively quash the original films' US releases."

But there is more. Successful French films have recently become like demo tapes for US studio executives too busy to read scripts, which would anyway be more expensive to develop than buying foreign film rights. Thus the American interest is clear, even if US remakes have not all done as well as 'Three Men' or 'Sommersby'. So why are the French now so keen to collaborate, to the extent of selling their rights before the original has even come out in France (as is the case for Jacques Fansten's 'Roulez Jeunesse')?

Since the coming of sound in the early 30s raised language barriers, Hollywood has waged a one-sided economic-linguistic war with the rest of the world. After various solutions were tried to circumvent the language problem (from polyglot films to multi-language versions), remakes became one of the ways Hollywood could curb the distribution of French films in the US and increase its own worldwide sales.

Divide and rule strategies also cashed in on internal conflicts within the French film industry. For while the interests of French producers clearly lay with sustaining French production, those of the distributors and exhibitors were tied to American movies, whatever their source material (American distributors were already well established in France by the 30s). This manifestation of trade imperialism was further complicated in the post-war period when new measures levied money from exhibition (including of US films) on the French market to be ploughed back into French production.

There are also more direct gains to be made. Remake rights nowadays can be worth up to \$1 million to a French film-maker, more than many original versions can recoup at home. The next logical step was for French companies to co-produce remakes, as have, among others, Jean-François Lepetit for 'Three Men and a Baby' and Le Studio Canal Plus for 'Sommersby', thus providing a further twist in this Franco-American war of attrition, epitomised by the ineffable *franglais* expression, 'le remake'. Such an 'if you can't beat them, join them' strategy is clearly attractive, indeed may be the only solution, although it does little for French film exports as such, and may unwittingly hasten the globalisation of story-telling.

Unequal billing: the protagonists of 'Three Men and a Baby', in which Tom Selleck (centre) is consistently favoured in importance as both character and major star



◀ recognisable, the camera focusing consistently on her face. Throughout the rest of *Three Men*, Tom Selleck is discreetly but consistently favoured, both as character (for example, his workplace is a feature) and star (references are made to his muscular *Magnum P.I.* image, for instance in the jogging scenes).

Martin Guerre and *Sommersby* feature stars of similar status. Yet while the French film goes for longer takes and a predominance of medium shots, *Sommersby* classically builds up its scenes from general shots to close-ups, with a relentless emphasis on the latter (possibly not unconnected with Gere's status as co-producer). If Depardieu is at the centre of most frames, he is usually surrounded by a crowd or several other characters, whereas the medium shots or close-ups of Gere (and Jodie Foster) create a void around them, isolating them in space. There are a few close-ups of Depardieu and Nathalie Baye, but instead of the classical Hollywood shot-countershot which structures all major encounters in *Sommersby* (Jack and Laurel, Jack and Orin), *Martin Guerre* uses two-and three-shots, or tableau scenes.

The effect is to visualise the different projects of the two films. *Sommersby* opens on the burial of a body under a pile of stones, but almost immediately gives us a close-up of Gere's face. Then follows a series of views of him travelling through nature towards the village, already an individual, distinct from the others (a long-shot of the crowded tobacco field is repeated later with him alone dancing). *Martin Guerre* also begins with an individual on the move, but he turns out to be the lawyer coming to draw up Martin's marriage contract. Despite the introduction in *Sommersby* of issues such as racial emancipation and post-Civil War economic revival, the effect of the camerawork is to make Jack/Gere into a detached, 'universal' hero, with the overtones of a religious saviour. In *Martin Guerre*, by contrast, the way the star merges visually in space with his community echoes the way the hero and the tale are embedded in a social structure; hence the emphasis on the legal representatives who open (the lawyer) and close (the parliamentary adviser) the story. While in *Sommersby*, apart from Orin, the community is ultimately united, the symbolic split of *Martin Guerre*'s hero(es) echoes that of the community itself, a division with resonance in a French history replete with figures who both divided and reconciled the nation, from Napoleon to Maréchal Pétain and Général de Gaulle. As Edmund White said recently (a propos of the way Jean Genet has been portrayed in literature): "Americans don't see people like that - as figures in a landscape. They see people as close-ups of a unique face." Here, of course, is another reason why French cinema is difficult to export: figures in a landscape are more difficult to grasp (without the knowledge of that landscape) than "close-ups of a unique face".

Exporting gender

All six films are concerned in some way with gender. While *Martin Guerre*/*Sommersby* asks: what is a man?, and *Nikita*/*The Assassin*: what is a woman?, *Trois hommes*/*Three Men* ponders the

nature of masculinity in relation to the experience of fatherhood.

Feminist analyses of *Trois hommes*/*Three Men* have seen the films as a sinister hijacking of motherhood by men, typical of post-feminism. Tania Modleski, for instance, claims that: "the function of [*Three Men and a Baby*] is simply to give men more options than they already have in patriarchy: they can be real fathers, 'imaginary' fathers, godfathers, and, in the older sense of the term, surrogate mothers."

This is true as far as the general narrative is concerned, but it ignores several important differences between the two films. Serreau, who came to mainstream genre from feminist documentary, spends much more time than Nimoy depicting the repetitious drudgery involved in looking after a baby, as well as its devastating effect on the men's career; later, a much greater part of the film is devoted to showing the emptiness of their lives without the baby. The realisation that our dominant myth about creation (Adam's rib) is an inversion of nature is voiced by Jacques: "I will create Adam from Eve's rib" - a crucial moment absent from *Three Men*. The drugs sub-plot is secondary in the French version, but dominates the second half of the US version. The 'drop' in *Trois hommes* takes the form of dumping nappies in a park bin; in *Three Men* it involves a drawn-out caper. This relates to the privileging in Hollywood cinema of action over reflection.

Signs of virility

The remakes seem to indicate that definitions of masculinity are far from universal. If in Hollywood masculinity is defined as diametrically opposed to femininity (as seen in the Western), there is a long tradition in French cinema of depicting masculinity as incorporating femininity. *Three Men* hysterically multiplies the traditional signs of virility in its heroes: they watch basketball, play billiards, read sports magazines. Selleck, an architect, is seen several times in that very macho icon - the hard hat - when he is not showing off his well-toned body (and unlike in the French film, he continues to have some relationship with his girlfriend Rebecca).

By contrast, *Trois hommes* depicts the three heroes often *en déshabillé* and focuses on Michel Boujenah's short, round and soft naked torso. Mothering in men is shown to strike a chord with an inner 'feminine' side which, rather than being disavowed, has been dramatised through the history of French cinema as either vulnerability or capacity for nurturing. Though this trend may marginalise actual women, it also provides an exposé of 'normal' masculinity. *Trois hommes* updates this pattern to include the nitty-gritty of looking after babies, whereas older films took the children (often girls) as already grown up.

Re-viewing *Martin Guerre* after seeing *Sommersby*, one is struck by the overt Oedipal narrative of the former. Revealed as sexually impotent on his wedding night, and cruelly mocked in a Mardi Gras ritual, Martin must go away to become a man - unlike Jack Sommersby, whose departure is motivated by the

Prodigal father

Le Retour de Martin Guerre

dir: Daniel Vigne, 1982

With Gérard Depardieu and Nathalie Baye

In mid-sixteenth century France, Martin Guerre (Depardieu) returns to his village in the south after a long and mysterious absence. Initially surprised, the villagers, his family and wife (Baye) accept him back with open arms. However, after he claims money owed to him by his uncle, and when itinerant beggars identify him as 'Pansette', doubts creep in, and Guerre is tried in court for fraud. Released once, he is re-tried and, at the point where he is about to be freed, the real Martin Guerre returns. 'Guerre'/Depardieu admits to being Pansette and is hanged.

Sommersby

dir: Jon Amiel, US/France, 1993

With Richard Gere and Jodie Foster

The story is transposed to Tennessee two years after the Civil War. Jack Sommersby (Gere) returns to his small town after a long absence. His wife Laurel (Foster), the villagers and Laurel's friend Orin are suspicious, but all except Orin are eventually won over. Jack, a liberal in favour of black emancipation, revives the town's prosperity with a new crop of tobacco. But doubts are cast on his identity and he is tried for murder. Even though admitting he is not Sommersby would save his life, he sticks to this identity and is hanged.



'Le Retour de Martin Guerre'

war. Martin returns sexually potent, as expressed by the metaphor of the leggings (too large in the past, but which he now fills) but the return of his symbolically castrated alter ego expresses the masculine/feminine dichotomy of the French male hero. By contrast, Jack Sommersby 'proves' his virility through a series of action tests: sowing the seeds, defending his family against the KKK.

If we turn to heroines, we find a lesser narrative complexity in the construction of femininity. For a start, women occupy less important roles (except in *Nikita/The Assassin*). But there is nevertheless greater acknowledgement of female sexuality in the French films, no doubt again linked to different standards of moral censorship. For example Bertrande (Baye) acknowledges her desire and uses sexual pleasure as a criterion for identifying Martin in court; this is replaced in *Sommersby* by the



'Nikita'

The film ends on Laurel putting flowers on his tomb, marked 'Jack Sommersby'.

Men's talk

Trois hommes et un couffin

dir: Coline Serreau, 1985

With André Dussolier, Michel Boujenah, Roland Giraud

Pierre, Michel and Jacques are three Parisian bachelors sharing a flat. One day, a baby (Marie, Jacques' daughter, of whom he was hitherto unaware) and a mysterious (drugs) parcel are delivered to them. The film charts the baby's disruption of the men's lives and their gradual learning how to look after her, complicated by the secondary plot of the drugs story. After the baby is reclaimed by her mother, the men find their lives suddenly feel very empty, and are delighted when mother and baby return.

Three Men and a Baby

dir: Leonard Nimoy, US, 1987

With Tom Selleck, Steve Guttenberg, Ted Danson

A similar storyline to the above, transposed to New York, with different emphases.

Gun women

Nikita

dir: Luc Besson, 1990

With Anne Parillaud, Tcheky Karyo, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Jeanne Moreau

A former Parisian drug addict condemned to death for killing a policeman, Nikita (Parillaud) is reprieved in exchange for becoming an undercover state assassin, under a mentor called Bob (Karyo) and the advice of an older woman (Moreau). Upon completion of her training, she executes a series of increasingly difficult hits. She starts a relationship with a young man (Anglade) who becomes suspicious of her mysterious past and of her activities. After a particularly horrific mission, she vanishes.

The Assassin

(US release title: *Point of No Return*)

dir: John Badham, 1993

With Bridget Fonda, Gabriel Byrne, Dermot Mulroney, Anne Bancroft

A similar storyline, transposed to the US, with different emphases and a more explicit ending in which the young woman is seen to escape.

muscular than Fonda's, and like the young Bardot she uses insolence and wit as weapons to attack her patriarchal rulers. There is ambivalence in this: her body and insolence simultaneously provide a pleasing spectacle for men (as in the scene where Nikita outwits her judo master, witnessed by an indulgent Bob) and a point of identification for female spectators. The retaliatory power of language is less in evidence in *The Assassin*.

Lessons in femininity

The most interesting and problematic area of difference lies in the 'lesson in femininity' offered by the two films. One way of reading *Nikita* is as the transformation of an androgynous, *transnational* youth – gum-chewing and virtually indistinguishable from her male friends whose grunts consist of such words as "zapper" – into a French woman, with all the accoutrements of the part from Degas posters to couture clothes and the ability to decorate a Parisian apartment. At the heart of this transformation are the lessons given by the motherly figure of Jeanne Moreau, who teaches that femininity is a mask you learn to put on (like a clown's smile) and which you can use as a weapon. If such a notion of femininity contains its own misogyny, it also exposes itself as such, alluding to the ambivalent New Wave heroines played by Moreau (*Les Amants*, *Jules et Jim*).

The Assassin replaces this education by a more banal "charm school" run by Anne Bancroft where table rather than sexual manners are taught. *The Assassin* (as with the depiction of the few women in *Three Men*) is in a sense more egalitarian than *Nikita* (and *Trois hommes*), but at the price of de-sexualising its heroine, as indicated by the change in title: the neutral *Assassin* (and the meaningless *Point of No Return* in the US) as opposed to the androgynous *Nikita*. If we recall that *Nikita* was distributed in the US as *La Femme Nikita*, we can infer that an explicitly female killer is acceptable as long as she is 'foreign'. The Fonda character, like Jack Sommersby, is morally redeemed by the narrative of *The Assassin*, while disturbing areas are displaced on to signs of 'otherness' (the Nina Simone poster and songs, the New Orleans episode).

The Hollywood remake of even such a supposedly Americanised French film as *Nikita* reveals that the cultural references of the original significantly inflect supposedly international generic codes. The fact that *Nikita* was successful worldwide may make its remake particularly pointless; one can only speculate what Besson might have made of it. Like Serreau for *Three Men*, and more recently Francis Veber, he pulled out of directing in Hollywood. Reasons are not always clear, but seem to hinge on control. This is not surprising, since French and American lawyers are hard at work hammering out transatlantic contracts which can cope with the differences between French and US law when it comes to the film industry: what constitutes the auteur of a film, and what rights he/she has over the product are among the top questions. As with the films themselves, the differences reveal as much about cultural traditions as they do about commerce.

'*The Assassin*' is reviewed on page 36 of this issue

Why should the video camera be such an unnerving presence in recent cinema, from 'Patriot Games' to 'L.627'? By Chris Darke

SIBLING RIVALRY CINEMA AND VIDEO AT WAR



The life of the voyeur: the innocent video world of Mazursky's 'Down and Out in Beverly Hills', left; Andie MacDowell's discovery of a man's secret life in 'sex, lies and videotape', above

● Towards the end of Eleanor Coppola's documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, husband Francis adds a coda in which he enthusiastically imagines "some little fat girl from Ohio making a beautiful film with her dad's video camera." In Coppola's scenario, film will be re-established as an art at the expense of cinema as a business. Queer avant-garde video diarist Sadie Benning could well be Coppola's dreamgirl, with the camera in question being the lowest of low audio-visual technologies: the \$200 Pixelvision video camera manufactured for children (and now discontinued) by the corporate big daddy Fisher-Price. In Benning's 1992 tape *It Wasn't Love*, she parallels her use of this low-end technology with an appropriation of Hollywood archetypes – the vamp, gangster, crooner and thug among others – in a strategy of neo-punk DIY. This is perfectly expressed in her declaration, "We didn't need Hollywood, we *were* Hollywood."

Coppola and Benning: the mainstream and the margins. Cinema and video: Cain and Abel, as Jean-Luc Godard put it. With film increasingly incorporating video, the traditional face-off that so often pits the two technologies against one another – the 'direct' light of film versus the 'indirect' light of video – seems finally to have dissolved. Or has it simply been replaced by a derivation of this same opposition – one that currently expresses itself in a cinematic fear and loathing of the video image, which is employed to characterise a nightmarish gamut of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties? The video image as a symbol of the end of the century? But whose century? Cinema's, of course.

Videogenic spectacles

In June 1982 the American journal *Film Comment* ran a special supplement on video that included reports on the cable boom, MTV and video art. But nothing on video-in-film. Certainly, there was a lengthy assessment of Coppola's then state-of-the-art Zoetrope experiments in 'electronic cinema', but from the angle of it being an interesting, if exceptional, hybrid of the two media, a film-into-video cross-pollination. Perhaps this oversight was due to a desire to negotiate, or simply to avoid the familiarly reductive cultural *parti pris* – for film, *ergo* against video.

In the same issue J. Hoberman rendered the tenor of the times with his admirably inclusive, though somewhat disingenuous, statement that "Movies and video are two kinds of Cinema." Much appears to have changed in the intervening 11 years. Cinema, to bowdlerise somewhat from the Godard quotebook, has since become occupied territory – the video image is now ubiquitous. But anyone could have told you that, anyone who'd seen *Video-drome*, *sex, lies and videotape*, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, anything by Atom Egoyan, *Patriot Games*, Walter Hill's *Trespass* – to list a few disparate but key films. Far more interesting are the *terms* of video's ubiquity. Or, put another way, what has video-in-film come to mean?

Video-in-film allows cinema to access images from its margins – from amateur video, high- and low-tech surveillance equipment, pornography – and resituate them. Often employed in

film in order to implicate the spectator as consumer and voyeur of such images, video might also be seen as cinema's means of responding to media massification and to its own loss of sovereignty in the process.

Yet even as video is made up of this variety of forms, it has a limited repertoire of functions, all of which hinge on video being seen as cinema's *other*. To gauge how homogeneous the connotations of video-in-film have become, it is revealing to look back to an early example (probably not the earliest, but indicative nonetheless): Paul Mazursky's *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986). What is striking from this distance is how archaic the video images seem, almost quaint, but also euphoric. This film doesn't have any problems with video; it appropriates the visual styles of MTV and 'scratch video' (remember 'scratch video'?) and puts them to work to add a little post-modern noise to an adaptation of Renoir's *Boudu sauvé des eaux*. The euphoria comes from the fact that Mazursky's film features a new cinematic figure – the kid with the camcorder – who is grounded in an almost prelapsarian vision of video culture. This is before the Gulf War, before Broadgate, before video had come to be identified as witness to real horrors that would otherwise have remained invisible – the abduction of Jamie Bulger, the assault of Rodney King, the repeated sex crimes (recorded by their perpetrator on security video) of Algerian police chief Mustapha Tabet.

Mazursky's kid has not aged gracefully – something happened to him in that Beverly Hills bedroom to produce a troupe of characters whose relationship to video is seen almost exclusively in terms of a problematised masculinity. And in films populated by these human adjuncts to video technology, the Godardian vision of the camera as "communication in a solid state" is transformed. The camcorder becomes alienation in a solid state. Video gets in the spaces between people, materialises the desires that reside there – especially the guilty, transgressive desires – and makes that space thick with images, insuperable. Fast-forward, rewind, freeze: these vital attributes of video are germane to all manner of fetishistic desires (*pace* the homicidal Henry and Otis in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, the impotent Graham in *sex, lies and videotape*). At one level video-in-film is a character in itself, both the expression and materialisation of fetishistic drives, locked into a double-bind of symptom and cause with its user and its user's desire.

Alongside this (already somewhat hackneyed) expressive presence, video-in-film opens up equally important formal possibilities. It is immediately reflexive and mediating, installing another image-time within the time of the film and allowing modernists *manqués* such as Wenders in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* and Egoyan in *Family Viewing* to create *trompe l'oeil* effects that fragment both the narrative and the image on the screen. Likewise, in Bertrand Tavernier's *L.627*, precisely because the film wears its realist aspirations so visibly, it must also acknowledge its usurper in the realism stakes by accommodating video, with its "extra quantity of analogy", to quote French

critic Raymond Bellour. Bellour suggests that in the successive histories of the mechanical reproduction of the world, photography produced the first image to be invested with a "quantity of analogy", a basic realism to which cinema adds the analogy of movement. Video supplements this with "a new analogy, that of an image without any delay." As a simultaneously degraded and clinical presence within the well-mastered film image, the video image has come to replace the grain of 8mm and newsreel with its own zero-degree realism. That (film) was then, this (video) is now.

States of surveillance

In *L.627* Lulu (Didier Bezace), an officer in the Paris drugs squad, moonlights as an off-duty video-maker. This would-be film-maker turned cop (Lulu failed the entrance exams for IDHEC, the French film school) hits on the idea of taking to work the camera which until then he has used solely to film weddings (or in a playfully half-hearted but nonetheless telling attempt to cajole his wife into a little home-video eroticism). Having been the recorder of intimate images, Lulu's camera becomes an instrument of surveillance.

The implication is that surveillance is always already a function of video – whether at the manned, local level of Lulu's usage or in the form of the seemingly autonomous 'eye-in-the-sky' of Phillip Noyce's *Patriot Games*. Noyce's film, which self-consciously plays with the hybrid images of satellite surveillance, is a showcase for state-of-the-art imaging equipment. (Noyce further explores this theme in his new Sharon Stone vehicle *Sliver*, whose narrative concerns an apartment block owner who may or may not be using surveillance cameras to spy on his tenants.) Yet while the video image undoubtedly functions as an ultramodern tic, there is more at work here than a simple high-tech spicing of generic leftovers. These images announce that there is no longer any circumstance in which everything cannot be seen.

Such an overwhelming mediation of reality was the subject of *The Society of the Spectacle*, a text written over 25 years ago by the French Situationist critic Guy Debord. And though the Situationist International has tended to be sidelined as a prankish aberration, the surrealistic sloganeers of May '68, it was Debord's work – dour, epigrammatic but prophetic – that made possible Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum. For Debord, the spectacle was late capitalism's crowning glory, alienation extended beyond its traditional Marxist materialist base to a near-metaphysical state of being where reality is separated from itself in an image. "But the critique that reaches the truth of the spectacle," he wrote, "exposes it as the visible *negation* of life, as the negation of life that *has become visible*." It is no surprise, then, that certain filmmakers should themselves undertake something approaching Debord's critique, aware of their medium's complicity but spurred on by a desire to distinguish cinema as somehow different from the extended reach of the spectacle incarnated in what we now call video-culture.

Noyce is no such director. The video images in *Patriot Games* start from and call upon ►

◀ images attached to specific events, or rather images that have become events in themselves: the electronic warfare images of Operation Desert Storm. The film is haunted by these event images and its video images are their ghosts. These are images of war which, as a state of permanent emergency, extends into the living room via television and video. The spectacle has its own home front.

The MTV aesthetic

Aside from the fact that both films share an opening screen-engulfing squall of video static that rapidly resolves itself into camcorder images of a mob slaying and a farmyard slaughter respectively, Walter Hill's *Trespass* and Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* beg to be considered as the recto and verso of the contemporary spectacle. In *Trespass* Hill plays with 'accidental' surveillance-by-camcorder (that descends directly from the George Holliday footage of Rodney King's assault) and turns a battle between two white treasure hunters and the drugs gang on whose patch they have strayed into a fable of the entropic consequences of racial conflict. Claustrophobically staged in a warehouse on the point of collapse – an urban America in microcosm – the film has the tail-chasing energy of a farce which, if the video images didn't carry with them such grave connotations, would be funny.

The narrative is set in motion by the camcorder images of the killing of one of the gang by a rival dealer on whom they seek revenge. The images are captured by a young blood called "Video", whose camcorder shots punctuate the film and serve a variety of functions. The principal of these is video-as-documentary-evidence, as the proof on which to base a slaying (or, by inference, a courtcase, an acquittal, a race riot, a retrial...). "Video never lies," says the black street kid with the camcorder, but the ghostly resonance of the images is contained by parallel deployments that accommodate the to-camera lip-synch performance style of the promo video and hence capitalise on the status of Ice Cube and Ice-T as rap icons.

As *Cahiers du cinéma* recently pointed out, *Trespass* also signals "the somewhat pretentious will to mix genre cinema with modernist cinema, to make as if, say, Raoul Walsh had seen a few Wim Wenders movies." In this hybrid, the images of Rodney King in the hands of the LAPD (in their own way as epochal as the Zapruder frames of the Kennedy assassination) are called forth, but their iconic force is irretrievably compromised by Hill's concessions to the MTV aesthetic. Or could it be that the incorporation of a promo-video aesthetic, heralded by Mazursky's film, is problematised, Mazursky's innocent euphoria now haunted by the extra-cinematic images of the King video?

Set against the rap energy of *Trespass*, Haneke's film is a model of European art-cinema sobriety, shot through with a cultural pessimism that makes Wenders' habitual Ozu-invoking nostalgia appear celebratory. *Benny's Video* is the second of a projected trilogy of films, the first being *The Seventh Continent* (1988) and the third to be the story of a serial killer seen from the perspective of his victims. They

chart the director's account of "the progressive emotional glaciation of my country".

Benny (Arno Frisch), a lonely Austrian adolescent left to his own devices by his well-to-do parents, shuts himself in his bedroom with his video equipment. The blinds permanently drawn, the outside world intruding only through a surveillance monitor on the wall, bookcases stacked with video cassettes, Benny views and re-views the tape that opens the film – a home video of a farmer's 'humane' killing of a pig with a shock-stick. Not a bloody death, only an overdose of electrical current; not a trace of the act's violence, just a squeal, then silence. Benny has stolen the instrument and, when he invites a girl of his own age back to his den to watch the tape, he tests the implement on her. With the first shot to her leg she collapses, screaming. A second shot to the head and silence. Benny's video has been recording throughout and it is these images that his parents see and to which they respond by covering up for their son, the mother taking him on holiday to Egypt while the father, unknown to Benny, disposes of the body.

"Video never lies" – but Benny's parents, faced with the evidence of their son's crime, conceal the truth of his act from the law and the truth of their own act from their son. But Benny has them taped – this time aurally – and the film closes with a surveillance-camera image of the parents being arrested following Benny's confession.

Benny's crime is the reflex action of an adolescent "glaciated" by his immersion in the video culture, and the film is as bleak and undemonstrative as Benny himself, this bourgeois European kid-with-a-camcorder, a video-somnambulist impassive as a Bressonian "model". If this sounds damning, Haneke intends it to be. For while in *Patriot Games* and *Trespass* video is the ghost of other images and other events, Haneke casts video as the very incarnation of the evil demon or images.

The numerous fascinations of *Benny's Video* stem from the cinematic values it counterposes as alternatives to the video culture and its discontents. For Haneke employs a deeply Bressonian "cinematography" (a word used expressly in the director's statement on the film), one marked by a refusal of spectacle, a concentration on gesture – particularly in the exchange of money, highly reminiscent of *Pickpocket* and *L'Argent* – and a mostly static camera with the actors treated as "models". He also stages what



Domestic pictures: Atom Egoyan's 'Family Viewing'

must now be the paradigmatic Bressonian resolution, where the possibility of salvation comes only through imprisonment and the judgement of the law. Haneke's turning to Bresson says a lot about the director's own vision of cinematic values. It is as though Bresson provides the strategy necessary to exorcise the demon evoked by video as well as a model of cinematic restraint available to film-makers who cannot trust the audio-visual but wish fervently to demonstrate the special status of cinema within it, and somehow apart from it.

From the opening camcorder images to the closing surveillance shots, the film reveals what it sees as the pernicious multiplicity of functions such technology makes possible – the camcorder that records the killing is also used to film mother and son's Egyptian holiday. While on one level it is a manifesto well in tune with current moral panics over video violence, and will no doubt be welcomed by those panicking as well as by those propagating the panic, it also stands as a kind of limit case of film's incorporation of video.

Electronic nightmare

The surveillance camera represents the *ultima ratio* of the spectacle as defined by Debord, and cinema's incorporation of it has grown in parallel with its developments in scope and scale. From Lang's vision of domestic surveillance in *The Thousand Eyes of Dr Mabuse* (1960) to the interface between Hollywood and the Pentagon's 3Ci (control, command, communications, intelligence) operations portrayed in *Patriot Games*, surveillance has become the culminating state of the image, an essentially pornographic *mise-en-scène* in which we are both actors and, thanks to the camcorder, directors. The pornographic is understood here as the reflex response of voyeuristic participation that surveillance entails and whose founding example is the genre of pornography itself. Or, as Frederic Jameson has put it: "Pornographic films are only the potentiation of films in general, which ask us to stare at the world as if it were a naked body." It only remains for a Cronenberg or an Egoyan to take the next technologically feasible step (and so fulfil the dreams of paranoid fantasists everywhere): that of making a film that incorporates the technology of fibre-optic cameras in a generic hybrid of body-horror and modernist cinemas to concoct a narrative of internal surveillance.

The vision of videophilia that *Benny's Video* presents is qualitatively different from the cinephilia of a previous age, with Benny's room an electronic nightmare of Plato's Cave. The severity of this vision and the moralistic position that underwrites it refuse to countenance the liberating possibilities of video. In Haneke's schema the engagement with video represented in the work of someone like Sadie Benning cannot be acknowledged; video enslaves rather than liberates. But Haneke's is only one of the spaces permitted to video-in-film and beyond the polarities of video as either ghostly or demonic lie the more experimental hybridisations of Egoyan, Wenders, Godard. And beyond these...? Keep watching these spaces. *'Benny's Video'* is released at the end of August

History and cinema remain the obsession of Godard in his television programmes, 'Histoire(s) du cinéma'. By Rod Stoneman

BON VOYAGE

● "It is interesting to approach the history of cinema as the last chapter of art, which itself is the last chapter of a certain kind of Indo-European civilisation..." (Jean-Luc Godard on *Histoire(s) du cinéma*)

As the tectonic plates of Europe's cultures collide and slide into new configurations, and a particular idea of cinema, as well as of Europe, seems to be coming to an end, Jean-Luc Godard dissects and reshuffles fragments of world cinema in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Godard conceived of *Histoire(s)* as five pairs of films, but only the first pair, 1A: *Toutes les histoires* (All the (Hi)stories) and 1B: *1 Histoire seule* (1 Single History), has been made and shown on French television, in 1989.

In these programmes, long, complex montages are interspersed with recitatives in which Godard, at a bookshelf or typing, invokes a forest of texts, literary and cinematographic. In the montage sections, layer upon layer of audio and visual quotation are brought together with a startling density of reference carried by multiple captions and voiceover. At one point a colour Western alternates with Mary Pickford in a silent film and Alexander Nevsky, all accompanied by dialogue from a French feature. Images combine and part – sliding through each other in slow dissolves, sometimes flicking backwards and forwards through single-frame alternation or rapid intercutting. In another sequence, with documentary images, a young Yugoslav partisan in the Second World War smiles in the face of death as the proficient leather-gloved hands of a German officer string him up by the neck. Godard's caption tenderly, ironically adds "Bon Voyage".

Several sections of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* circle moments of European historical fission, often conflating or at least connecting cinema and history. In 1940, the programme tells us, at the time of *The School for Wives* (*L'Ecole des femmes*): "Max Ophüls falls upon Madeleine Ozeray's bottom just as the German army takes the French one from behind..." Another sequence has a caption placed on Lenin as he lies 'asleep' in his coffin: "Lenine usine des rêves/Lenin the factory of dreams." The dream factory, a phrase usually applied to Hollywood, now encircles the engineer of Soviet socialist aspiration. The transposition suggests how much history in *Histoire(s)* is rewritten in terms of the history of cinema.

This is often articulated in terms of a European-US dynamic. As the commentary suggests: "So the First World War had allowed American cinema to ruin French cinema, but the birth of television and the Second World War would let it finance, i.e. ruin, the entire European cinema." Of course Godard's



Characteristic signature: text and images collide in Godard's material for 'Histoire(s) du cinéma'

preoccupation with the US is hardly something recent. He was one of the first generation of *Cahiers du cinéma* writers, who through the "politique des auteurs" critically validated popular American cinema. Yet after the rite of passage of '68 and a brief encounter with (a French fantasy version of) Maoism – "we should provoke two or three Vietnams in the bosom of the Hollywood-Mosfilm etc. empire..." – he developed a settled antipathy to Hollywood.

The active viewer

Unlike Hollywood's 'industry of escapism', Godard's cinema has always wanted to produce an active viewer; the injunction at the beginning of the first programme to "Let each eye negotiate for itself" appropriately emphasises the role of the individual viewer. Making sense of such a web of intertextuality is bound to produce different readings for each spectator. At worst it may facilitate the fetishistic activity of film buffs playing a version of 'spot the clip'. But Godard offers the viewer the same privileges he claims for himself – the endless resonant productivity of an open text, its meanings shifting upon repeated viewing.

In contrast to the aesthetic richness of the montage sections, the images of Godard at the bookshelf and typewriter, ironically reciting myriad book and film titles, are more ascetic. The several phases of Godard's own film

production have given him legendary status: 'Godard', the figure in *Histoire(s)*, is part of the history Godard interrogates. Here 'Godard' dramatises himself as a collector, lucidly manipulating the fragments and in so doing allowing new sets of relations to emerge. In such a productive 'open text', the movement between films dissolves disparate places, times and even cultures, creating unresolvable ambiguities and unstable meanings. Of course, this textual play is but a new version of Godard's familiar forms of thought. Whether in the discursive non-linearity of his film and television work, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, the book and lectures out of which the programmes evolved, or in interviews or even public performances, the same strategies are brought into play: digression, displacement, irony and imaginative 'lateral' logic.

The final irony of this incorrigibly ironic and seriously playful work is that a programme that explores the history of film does so through video and television. Yet in both technical and institutional terms, it is impossible to imagine the project taking place in any other way – now. The ability to slow down, dissolve, manipulate and re-articulate the material of *Histoire(s)* is conceivable only within the immediate plasticity of video – as is the ability to play with language through the electronic facility of constant captions. His-

toire(s) du cinéma confronts the terms of cinema's metamorphosis: "though television has realised Léon Gaumont's dream – to bring the spectacle of the whole world into the most wretchedly poor of bedrooms – it has done so by reducing the shepherds' gigantic sky to Tom Thumb's size."

Godard's remark in reply to a *Cahiers du cinéma* questionnaire of 1965 – "I await the end of Cinema with optimism" – becomes the caption at the end of *Week-end* (1967): "Fin de conte/Fin de cinéma." In *Histoire(s)*, made in a new electronic epoch, we have the twilight of cinema and the end of its "art without a future". Yet perhaps this sense of cinema's decay and decline is part of a bigger fall, tied up with the idea that, as is said in *Histoire(s)*, "cinema has always been the act of white boys showing off for other white boys."

At this end of the twentieth century, cinema lives in, on and through television. Whatever our vestigial affections for the focused experience, public space and the higher resolution of cinema itself, it should be recognised that the social experience of the audio-visual is now overwhelmingly in the home. The fragments Godard has "shored against his ruins" do not posit a cinema that is banned or abandoned, but that is seen lucidly in relation to its history and our future.

Who owns what?

Godard's eclectic borrowing in *Histoire(s)* raises questions of property and propriety: who owns history, Europe, cinema? The programmes themselves are labelled like Situationist texts with an anti-copyright: "non-(c) J-L G". And they certainly raise complex issues about international copyright, the ownership of film images and the differences between the various European legal systems. The programmes had already been broadcast by French, German and Swiss television when a British screening was first proposed two years ago. The initial reaction was of considerable apprehension as, on first glance, it appeared that the programmes were made almost entirely of images borrowed from a pile of VHS cassettes. All the film clips were apparently uncleared and unpaid for.

Under recent legislation the reasonable use of extracts does not infringe the copyright in them if its purpose is criticism or review, provided the use is "fair dealing". In *Histoire(s) du cinéma* the borrowed images and sounds speak largely for themselves and the narrative flows almost entirely from the interweaving of these fragments. With some ingenuity, Channel 4's lawyers proposed that the programmes could be shown under this fair dealing provision. Although we hope this will not involve legal action, *Godard on Cinema* is likely to present the strongest cultural case for the argument that the spirit of an enabling law should be applied to permit the innovative or revolutionary, just as its letter permits the tradition of formal criticism.

'Histoire(s) du cinéma' will be screened on Channel 4 on 21 and 28 June



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The wonderful face

I think of two faces in movies, from the early days of sound. They've haunted me for years, though they're not famous faces – I had to look up their names to write about them. The first is that of Sybille Schmitz in Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932). It's not Dreyer's greatest work, but it disturbs in the best sense – images, looks, few words, an atmosphere you can't shake from your skull.

The story comes from an Irish writer, Sheridan Le Fanu, whose 'Schalken the Painter' I made as a television film some years ago. For this, his first sound picture, Dreyer adapted a Le Fanu tale of a female vampire. The film titles say it's inspired by 'In a Glass Darkly', the title story in a collection of short stories, but in fact it owes much to Le Fanu's masterpiece 'Carmilla' in the same collection.

The film is discomfiting from the start. We see the moody hero, David Gray, come to the mysterious inn "after sunset, by the river, in the village of Courtempierre". There's the cockerel inn sign silhouetted against the sky, then a shot from the interior showing Gray approaching the glass door, tapping on it, going away unanswered to look for another way in. Then we see, in the same order, the very same shots, the same action all over again. Is it, I wonder rather shamefacedly, a mistake in the neg cut? No, it has to be Dreyer's way of inviting us into a waking dream.

Our hero books into the unwelcoming hostelry; an engraving on a wall in his room shows Death with a huge knife approaching a bedridden patient. Next door a nutty professor mutters incantations. An elderly gentleman invades Gray's bedroom muttering "she must not die." For a 90s viewer, time warps: the professor looks uncannily like Jack MacGowran in Polanski's *Dance of the Vampires*. And our hero will dream he's encased in a glass coffin, as though he'd seen Ken Russell's *Mahler*.

Throughout the film Dreyer plays with pans and tracks, leaving a character, wandering restlessly across a room or along a corridor, finding the actor again. When we first see the young woman, Léone, Sybille Schmitz, the wonderful face, in her bedroom, Dreyer pans past her on the bed, follows her nurse to the door, pans back to reveal Léone's now empty bed.

She has gone for a moonlight walk, and is discovered draped insensible over a tree trunk in the pose of Fuseli's *Nightmare*, glowered over by a grandfatherly vampire. She is taken back to be ministered to by a nun, and worried over by her sister. Clearly now she has an undead problem. This is confirmed when we get a glimpse of the professor's *Teach Yourself Vampires* manual.

We know there has to be a moment of truth when the lovely Léone is revealed for what she is become. We've had decades of experience in the classic moment of vampire revelation. But what happens here is so simple, so devoid of calculated effects, that it's truly shocking.

I seem to remember it happening in one tracking shot, but when I check I find it's done in a series of cuts. Léone's sister walks across the bedchamber. Léone lifts her head

Revelatory and subtle film acting can be found in the haunted faces in Dreyer's 'Vampyr' and Max Ophüls' 'Liebelei' says Leslie Megahey, whose first feature film 'The Hour of the Pig' will be released in late autumn

on the pillow, opens her splendid dark eyes, and touches them with her fingers, as if she would weep, an innocent violated. Then, as her sister passes, Léone's face changes utterly. Her eyes widen, pupils roll upwards, her mouth twists, she looks like evil incarnate, and the insatiable, bestial appetite of the undead is exposed.

It's all done through the face of the actress – no prosthetics, no dry ice, no bloodshot contact lenses, no plastic vampire fangs. For one brief moment, this woman simply and believably turns into a vampire in front of our eyes, and it's petrifying. Now somebody else, probably the nun, walks in, and Léone reverts to her sweet young thing look.

I do like special effects that work: the transformations in *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Company of Wolves*, *The Terminator*. But while I'm admiring them, I can't help thinking "how did they do that?"

I know precisely how Sybille Schmitz does it – I've just tried to describe it. All it is, is a human being, an actor, altering her expression. But it has the terrifying quality of a childhood dream: a loved-one's face changing unexpectedly, inexplicably, so that we realise in that instant that we never really knew who they were. That chills the spine. That's real horror.

In the same year, 1932, Max Ophüls directed Magda Schneider in his fine melodrama *Liebelei*. Like Schmitz (and she's very like Schmitz, could be sisters), Schneider radiates a superb open innocence in a strong, handsome face. The story, from Arthur Schnitzler, is about Christine, a poor but honest Viennese girl who loves a dashing, womanising cavalry lieutenant.

From having seen her as easy meat, he falls for her, and they are to be married. He has one last macho cavalry-officer task to fulfil; wishing to spare her anxieties, he doesn't tell her about it. His past has come back to haunt him – a cuckolded husband has challenged him to a duel and honour demands he see it through.

Ophüls had to create a climactic scene in which her friends must tell Christine

about the duel and its outcome. When they come to her later on the fateful morning, she has no idea what has happened, and we're not entirely sure either. For in the master stroke, Ophüls has let us in on the beginning of the duel, but not the end. We see the combatants arriving in their black carriages, see the line of fire being paced out. Then Ophüls' camera whisks us away, unwilling, to join a couple of the officer's apprehensive friends as they listen for the shots. They hear only one: where's the second?

Now, behind a glass door (another glass door) Christine is told of the night's events. But her friends can't get the words out – too fearful, too ashamed of knowing what she doesn't. The camera doesn't even look at them. We watch only Christine's face, for what seems like minutes, in one slow, gentle track in, and in it we see the dawning of the terrible truth.

The only dialogue comes from her; phrase by phrase, quietly, with no histrionics, she pieces together what must have happened, looking only to her friends' faces for confirmation. The dialogue is wonderfully simple, simply spoken, halting, repeating itself, correcting itself.

Like the revelation scene in *Vampyr*, it's the simplest of ideas. Ophüls could have given it the full works – the stammered story from the fearful friends, the close-up reactions, the hysterical tears and attempts at consolation, the sympathetic symphony orchestra. But Schneider's face tells it all, and it's marvellous. And that face confirms something I often forget – the fact that fine, subtle film acting was already well developed years ago, from the very beginning of the talkies, indeed from the silent days.

Orson Welles said (about his character in *Touch of Evil*) that he wanted to create something that was unreal and yet true. It's a pretty good definition of what we should be striving for in fantasy films, all films perhaps. The two actresses I've written about achieve it, and the truth-telling of those faces stays to haunt more than half a century after the camera turned on them.



Metamorphosis: Sybille Schmitz as the young, troubled woman in Dreyer's 'Vampyr'

BFI STILL, POSTERS AND DESIGNS

All about Marilyn

Claire Monk

Marilyn Monroe: The Biography

Donald Spoto, Chatto and Windus, £17.99, 750pp

Norman Mailer, whose *Marilyn* was published in 1973, admitted that he did it for the money. Robert Slatzer – a “fan” whose sole known meeting with Monroe was a snapshot session while she was shooting *Niagara* in 1952 – went much further, ludicrously claiming in his book *The Life and Curious Death of Marilyn Monroe* to have been married to her for a few days during her engagement to Joe DiMaggio and going on to fabricate a chat-show career as her “closest personal confidant”. In the context of the babel of male Marilyn fictions, any new biography claiming, as Spoto’s does, to give us “The Truth – Finally” faces obvious hurdles of sceptical reception. Another story? Who needs it? And why has it taken 30 years for the “truth” to be heard?

The answer to this last question lies in Spoto’s “exclusive” access (shared, one suspects, with a hardy researcher) to 35,000 pages of confidential documents from the estate of Milton Greene, Monroe’s one-time photographer and lover and later partner in Marilyn Monroe Productions. These include Monroe’s own writings and a day-to-day record of her life kept (at her request) by the company’s lawyer – plus perusal of (among other things) her psychiatric and gynaecological records, the pathologist’s reports on her death and recently declassified US government documents.

The result is a constantly surprising re-evaluation which makes Gloria Steinem’s feminist rescue attempt *Marilyn* look like another infantilising myth of the helpless victim. After the 70s masculinist myth-making of Mailer *et al* and Steinem’s 80s fantasy of sisters in shining armour, Spoto’s biography is a post-feminist excavation of a pre-feminist icon that restores to Monroe the simple dignity of being treated as an active agent in her own life: a troubled adult who only sometimes appeared like a frightened child, intelligent and ambitious as well as self-doubting and scared.

One of the book’s discoveries is that mental illness was not hereditary in Norma Jean’s family – but the mistaken belief that it was became a contributing factor to her mother’s disturbance (and to the adult Monroe’s terrified and guilty avoidance of her institutionalised parent). With this new slant comes a subtle but significant shift in our reading of Monroe’s story: the struggle which became the leitmotiv of her life was not against madness but against the fear of madness; her tragic end was not predestined after all.

Marilyn’s own terrifying ordeal in a high-security mental hospital in 1961 emerges here as a blatant act of abuse by her (female) psychiatrist Dr Kris; Monroe knew it, too, and sacked the shrink immediately afterwards. (And we wonder why Marilyn lacked a sense of sisterhood.) Indeed, Spoto’s account makes Monroe seem far saner than the father figures who belittled her while sponging on her success (method-acting guru Lee Strasberg and third husband Arthur Miller among them) and the hypocrisies of Hollywood and her time are

much to blame for the fact that we all thought otherwise. “[Her] culture,” Spoto writes, “asked more of Marilyn Monroe than perhaps of anyone in its popular history. And because she was a woman, she seemed to fail twice as badly.”

The surprises fly thick and fast. There is Monroe’s canniness as a self-publicist (she herself planted the Hollywood rumour that she was the new Jean Harlow) and clear-sighted assessment of her career (“If I keep on with parts like the ones [Twentieth Century Fox] gives me, the public will soon tire of me,” she declared in 1954). Most striking is her detached and sophisticated relationship with her screen image (she referred to the contradictory icon of active come-on and helpless passivity named ‘Marilyn Monroe’ in the third person). Her reduced movie output in 1955-62 (five films compared to 24 in the previous eight years) came not from depression but, Spoto suggests, from a growing frustration with her giggling, wiggling persona and a desire to discover other selves off screen as much as on. “If I can’t be myself, what’s the good of being anything at all?” she asked.

Spoto’s much hyped theory of her death cleverly integrates this quest for self-knowledge with the tale’s more familiar themes of submissiveness and vulnerability to exploitation. In this version, Monroe was killed not by the Kennedys, the Mafia or a self-administered overdose but by an enema of the hypnotic drug chloral hydrate admin-

istered by her peculiar housekeeper Eunice Murray (a plum role for Kathy Bates) on the instructions of Marilyn’s megalomaniac psychiatrist Ralph Greenson. By the time of her death, Greenson had (it is claimed) insinuated himself into Monroe’s dealings with Fox (he may even have been instrumental in her sacking from her last, unfinished film *Something’s Got to Give*), tried (with limited success) to annex her from more trustworthy colleagues and friends and installed Murray as his spy. But Marilyn had ceased to act the passive ‘good patient’ – and as her masseur and friend Ralph Roberts observed of her ‘treatment’ at the hands of Greenson, studio doctors and a needle-happy GP who wasn’t above dragging her out of restaurants to administer unrequested ‘vitamin jabs’: “It was obvious, wasn’t it? If you couldn’t control Marilyn one way, there were always drugs.” As for the Kennedys, Spoto maintains that the rumours originated as right-wing smears: Monroe slept with JFK just once, and on the few occasions when she met Bobby (always in company) they talked about civil rights rather than sex.

Whether you believe it or not, Spoto’s story is deliciously ironic – for while Dr Greenson was undoubtedly sick, the patient was struggling towards health. Neither suicidal nor washed up, at the time of her death Monroe had just been re-engaged by Fox on *Something’s Got to Give* at two-and-a-half times her original salary and was (per-



Method in her madness: Marilyn Monroe was saner than father figures such as Lee Strasberg, who belittled her while sponging on her success

haps rashly) about to marry Joe DiMaggio for the second time. Describing Marilyn's mood in her 36th and last summer, several of her friends choose the words "taking control of her life." It's the last phrase one would expect to be associated with the century's most vulnerable sex symbol – but after Spoto's book, perhaps it will.

The buddy politic

Paul Julian Smith

Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema

Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), Routledge, £35 (hb), £10.99 (pb), 272pp

Once there were high hopes for men's studies. Taking the lead from straight 'men in feminism' like Stephen Heath or gay 'out-laws' in feminism like Craig Owens, male scholars and theorists hoped to produce a new discipline, parallel and indebted to women's studies, which would displace men from their privileged position in cultural history and theory. Five or six years later the future looks less promising. Straight men fell victim to guilt and embarrassment; gay men discovered, with the rise of queer theory, that we had more in common with lesbians than we had supposed.

The central problem remains: how do you theorise a dominant term such as masculinity, one which (like heterosexuality or whiteness) is rendered invisible by its very pervasiveness? When Hollywood increasingly denies women any screen space, to focus on masculinity might simply be to offer more of the same. And with the much trumpeted return to history and retreat from the high psychoanalytic theory once championed by *Screen*, the critical climate has changed. The question of sexual difference now demands a more inflected, less abstract treatment. If, as the editors of this volume suggest, to "screen the male" in Hollywood is both to project and to protect him (to place his image centre frame and to absolve that image from the perils of critique), then there may be no way out of the male matrix.

This collection brings together essays by women and men, both established scholars (such as Lucy Fischer, Peter Lehman and Gaylyn Studlar) and younger critics from Britain, Australia and the US. Beginning with Steve Neale's attempt to address "masculinity as spectacle" (the only essay not written for the volume), contributors adopt two strategies: either they project issues generally associated with the feminine (masochism or masquerade once more) on to the masculine, or they address female spectatorship and ask the question "what is masculinity for women?" Studlar's essay on "optic intoxication" in Valentino is exemplary here. Focusing on "woman-made masculinity" in the first decades of the century, she argues convincingly for a fantasy reconciliation of masculine and feminine which none the less responds to changes in US society in the period. What she calls "dance madness" offered unique possibilities of pleasure for an audience of women. In her subtle accommodation of psychic and social material and in her extensive archival documentation, Studlar sets high standards not always met by later essays.

If it was actor-dancers such as Valentino,



Optical intoxication: Valentino's image in films such as 'The Young Rajah' offered the exquisite pleasures of woman-made masculinity to female audiences

Astaire and even Cagney who first posed the problem of the feminised man (the last is the object of a fine essay by Fischer), in the 70s and 80s this "mal(e)-aise" was transposed from the dance spectacle of the male body to the perverse fascination of the male with his own ability to occupy the female position. Thus four essays address male hysteria and masochism in Clint Eastwood, De Palma, Cronenberg and the horror and rape-revenge genres. Here "men in women's places" experience both attraction and repulsion. Central is the fluidity of identification transcending assigned gender identities suggested by psychoanalysis and the process of projection whereby, in classical Freudian style, male homosexual desire is transformed into hatred and persecution delusion. For Barbara Creed and Helen W. Robbins such unpromisingly misogynist movies as *Dressed to Kill* and *Dead Ringers* reveal a complex symptomology of male abjection and womb envy.

But what happens when the boys get together? Three essays explore antique bonding in *Spartacus*, the interpenetration of gender and 'race' in *Boyz n the Hood* and "the buddy politic" in the *Lethal Weapon* series. In these disparate films male couples function as fault lines, tracing barely submerged contours of racism and homoerotic homophobia. Finally, in the action movies of the late 80s and 90s the fetishised body of the white male (Stallone and Schwarzenegger) softens into a newly 'feminised' figure: as Susan Jeffords describes, in *T2 the Terminator* takes on an implausibly maternal function, even laying down its life like the mothers of Hollywood melodrama.

In their introduction the editors state that film theory since Laura Mulvey has tended to invoke the binaries of male/female, sadist/masochist, voyeur/exhibitionist, active/passive. They overstate the case. In Mulvey (and indeed Lacan), 'mascu-

line' and 'feminine' are precisely positions, in no sense reducible to the empirical subject in the cinema seat or on the analyst's couch. And a great deal of recent work has emphasised the fluidity of gender positions and audience address, from Studlar's vindication of male masochism in von Sternberg to Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (uncited here).

But if their thesis is by no means as original as they seem to believe, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark are still to be congratulated for throwing light on the darker continent of male sexuality. And with stills of Valentino as the Young Rajah stripped and draped with pearls, of Kirk Douglas as *Spartacus*, his torso daubed with paint, and of Kurt Russell and Stallone sharing an unlikely intimate moment, the illustrations alone are worth the price of the paperback.

A low laugh

Andy Medhurst

What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic

Henry Jenkins, Columbia University Press, \$37.50, 336pp

It is, perhaps, a commonplace of comedy criticism to point out that the comic mode has an inbuilt tendency towards the subversive, the ludic and the scandalous. Moreover, when comedy wants to unsettle and confound, it targets textual norms as well as social ones, with the result that most standard accounts of narrative (cinematic or otherwise) omit or gloss over comedy, bypassing it with faintly anxious disdain. After all, narrative theory is a sober, often glacially exact business; it cannot afford to let comedy across the threshold in case it runs amok and craps on the carpet.

The particular value of Henry Jenkins' extensive, assured and articulate book is that it takes that broad starting point but rigorously explores its workings in a specific historical time and place – Hollywood in the first half of the 30s. The industry was striving to come to terms with the new possibilities offered by sound technology – the rules were not yet fixed, the dust had far from settled – which opened up a space for the comic styles and performers that had developed on the vaudeville stage. By the end of the decade an ostensibly more polished set of comic codes had fallen into place, which ensured that the more disruptive, impolite, rough-and-tumble comedy of the first few sound years fell into critical disrepute. Jenkins' quest is to rehabilitate those earlier films.

These were movies centred on the personas and routines of vaudeville-trained comedians, which revelled in a blithe disregard for credible characterisation and narrative causality, thrived on transgression and parody, and frequently offered their audiences the opportunity to see figures of social authority ridiculed and humbled. The Marx Brothers are the most familiar exponents to us now, since their critical reputation did not undergo the eclipse suffered by most of their contemporaries. But that same reputation, Jenkins argues, has mistakenly led them to be celebrated as uniquely anarchistic, rather than acknowledging the depth and range of the traditions on which they drew. Consequently ►

◀ Jenkins spends more time on neglected acts like Wheeler and Woolsey or Olsen and Johnson, though it's interesting to note that the book's dust-jacket, presumably for commercial reasons, rescinds this democratic impulse by spotlighting Groucho Marx.

In tracing the lineages and landscapes of early sound comedy, the book supplies a wealth of contextual, historical detail that is at times overwhelming – a full scholarly apparatus can be a fine and noble thing, but chapters with 108 footnotes do leave the reader feeling factually battered, enervated by reference-lag. Happily, Jenkins knows how to redeem himself with evocative reports of comedians at work, prompting a desire to seek out the films he describes. He also provides sensitive analyses of the dynamics of gender and ethnicity within these comic frameworks. Eddie Cantor's career, for example, is fascinatingly presented as a case study of Hollywood capitulation to anti-semitism, his Jewishness increasingly effaced or masked in order to placate audience resistance in an era when *Variety* could matter-of-factly blame the relative failure of Fanny Brice's screen ventures on the limited appeal of her "Hebrew jesting".

What Made Pistachio Nuts? is an impressive, illuminating contribution to the history of film comedy. From my unrepentantly British standpoint, however, it would have been improved by the addition of a few transatlantic glances, if only because as I read through Jenkins' accounts of comedians who delighted in disgracefulness, who held hierarchies in clownish contempt, and who brought the dangerous kinetic urgency of stage comedy on to the stilted screen, I could not shift from my mind the image of the Crazy Gang, a British troupe whose delirium, daring and near-murderous ruthlessness would have given any of the Americans celebrated in this book a run for their money.

New kids on the block

Peter Biskind

The New Hollywood

Jim Hillier, Studio Vista, £14.99, 192pp

Jim Hillier's fine, if misnamed new book, is a fascinating account of the career trajectories of directors who are not Bob Zemeckis, Adrian Lyne or the Zucker brothers – that is to say, Hillier focuses on struggling white males, women, blacks and foreigners. The title is misleading, because though the phrase "New Hollywood" pops up predictably every five years or so as a friend to publicists and journalists at a loss to describe a new twist in the serpentine road of tinsel town history, it is usually applied to the movie brat generation of the 70s. Although good independent films continue to be made and distributed today, the New Hollywood of the 70s – before the era of blockbusters, before the elephantine, bottom line-oriented bureaucracies that now weigh on the studios, before agents gained a stranglehold over talent, before test screenings and astronomical marketing costs – no longer exists. Hillier's analysis of Hollywood trends and financial data is certainly on target, but there isn't much that is new about



contemporary Hollywood apart from its recent openness to blacks and women and the handful of financing wrinkles that have appeared in the last few years.

But nomenclature and the first two chapters aside (heavy going for anyone but the *Variety* addict), Hillier presents a very readable account, much of it in the directors' own words, of the uphill struggle from film school (or wherever) to the \$5 million house in Malibu – hopefully with values intact. The first few chapters focus on the exploitation market and television, both traditional ways of breaking into the establishment.

Exploitation has been relatively familiar territory since the 60s and 70s, when first American International and then Roger Corman's New World became hands-on postgraduate training ground for aspiring directors, besting anything USC, UCLA or AFI had to offer. Hillier focuses on the post-movie brat generation of Jonathan Demme, Jonathan Kaplan, Joe Dante, John Sayles and Amy Jones, as well as lesser known directors such as Mark Goldblatt and Aaron Lipstadt. The Corman story, although often told, appears to be a bottomless pit of anecdote and as the years pass it becomes increasingly clear what a serendipitous national treasure Corman has been.

Even today, with the proliferation of alternatives provided by cable purveyors like HBO and Showtime, television has rarely been examined as a halfway house to features, and the ups and downs of directors toiling in the small screen vineyards furnish material nearly as interesting as that provided by the Cormanoids. Hillier interviews an array of directors ranging from the relatively successful, such as *Miami Vice* producer Michael Mann, who

Ludic and scandalous: the Marx Brothers drew on critically neglected vaudeville traditions which revelled in parody and ridiculing authority

went on to direct a hit, *The Last of the Mohicans*, to the relatively unsuccessful, such as Bobby Roth, who have been unable to make the transition to features or have managed it only intermittently. They noodle, albeit with some wit and eloquence, the themes they might be expected to noodle: will it hurt or help their careers to work in television; what is the best way to bounce back from a flop or string of flops; and how best can they maintain their vision in a climate entirely given over to ratings and money?

If it's hard for white males, it's harder still for women, as Hillier's subjects – Penelope Spheeris, Randa Haines, Amy Heckerling and Susan Seidelman – attest. They don't have access to the "boy's club", that is, the predominantly male group of executives that has the power to greenlight projects; they don't play tennis or golf with studio jocks nor go to basketball games with Jack Nicholson. Moreover, they fall prey to male stereotyping that holds that women can't direct action films, can't direct commercial movies, can't control crews, and so forth. Haines recounts her experience of making the rounds with an AFI short, having executives tell her, "We think you're wonderful, we love you, we can't wait to work with you," after which nothing would happen. Seidelman, who saw a promising career wrecked by *Making Mr Right*, *Cookie* and *She-Devil*, talks about the perils of success and big budgets and laments the absence of moderately priced movies which fall mid-way between blockbusters and independents.

The experience of blacks is much the same, although the success of pictures such as *Boyz n the Hood* and *New Jack City* have made the studios ravenous for new black talent. Still, a veteran like Bill Duke, who made the underappreciated *Rage in Harlem*, discusses the ways in which the lily-white studios are not equipped to market most black subjects.

Hillier's book is a must-read for those thinking about a career in film, and also for readers who regard the movie industry as a spectator sport, but who are sated with the success stories of stars who have made it. His account offers a salutary reminder that many people don't, or only half make it, get stuck in exploitation, television, craft jobs like editing, or simply give up. More, his bottom-up approach provides a better understanding of how Hollywood works than the Olympian views provided by the celebrity-obsessed media.

Women after glasnost

Julian Graffy

Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time

Anna Lawton, Cambridge University Press, £36 (hb), £13.95 (pb), 288pp

Red Women on the Silver Screen:

Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era

Lynne Attwood (ed), Pandora, £12.99, 272pp

Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest

Peter Green, Macmillan, £40, 163pp

The fate of the (ex-)Soviet film industry in the years since 1985 has been that of the country in microcosm. Ambitious plans

to 'restructure' the old monolith while retaining a measure of control satisfied neither radicals nor conservatives. Eventually the old system broke down amid raucous apportioning of blame. At present, depending upon your point of view, chaos is leading to apocalypse, or an overdue shake-out has freed the most vigorous and talented for new artistic and economic successes. *Kinoglasnost*, as Anna Lawton admits, does not trace the most recent, vertiginous stages of this process, but it offers an informative and reliable guide up to the end of 1990 and canny predictions of later developments.

What makes *Kinoglasnost* pre-eminent among current studies of the subject is the sustained attention Lawton pays to changes in the formal organisation of Soviet cinema and in the cinema as industry. A chapter is devoted to the gradual atomisation of the once powerful Film Makers Union after its revolutionary Fifth Congress in 1986, and to alterations in other official bodies such as the state cinema committee, Goskino, the main film school, VGIK, and the cinematic press.

This is followed by a consideration of the changes in the running of the studios, including the introduction of self-financing and the relaxation of the state monopoly over production and distribution. Lawton shows Soviet film-makers and critics belatedly honing their strategies for assessing popular taste and examines the initial skirmishes between state organisations (notably the Komsomol, the Young Communist League) and independents to control the massively lucrative video business. If the state was able to deploy 'videotrails' in remote areas in a sad parody of the glorious 20s, an enterprising independent arranged showings in a morgue.

The rest – on the late Brezhnev years and the unshelved and new films of the Gorbachev period, subdivided according to their treatment of the past, present or dreaded future – is a more conventional, sometimes breathless survey of work regrettably known in Britain only by reputation. But here too Lawton is incisive and original about films as various as Konchalovsky's *Asia's Happiness* and Iurii Kara's mega-hit thriller *Kings of Crime* (which achieved an estimated 70 million viewers in 1989), while paying due attention to the output of documentarists.

The first half of the evocatively titled *Red Women on the Silver Screen* is devoted to the editor's long overview of Russian history, of the status and situation of Russian women, and of the development of Russian cinema in the twentieth century. Attwood has revealing points to make about women's experience, but she has cast her net exceedingly wide and the space available for discussion of cinema is consequently limited. Assessing the cinema of the 20s, for example, she writes well about the most interesting cinematic examination of the new woman, Abram Room's *Bed and Sofa*, but despite her ritual reminder that Eisenstein, Vertov *et al* were not the face of popular cinema of the period, she concentrates on the work of avant-garde directors, omitting all mention of such films as Zheliabuzhskii's *The Cigarette Girl from Mosselprom* or Boris Barnet's *The Girl with the Hatbox*.

Lack of focus also plagues the analysis of the Stalin period. Here Attwood finds room

for Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Maksim* trilogy, and devotes another four pages to Eisenstein, though she discusses *Aleksandr Nevskii* without any mention of its remarkable woman character, the warrior Vasilisa, and concludes lamely of *Ivan the Terrible* that it sees "woman as the embodiment of both good and evil". Yet she pauses only briefly to mention Grigorii Aleksandrov's *The Circus*, whereas a detailed examination of the four musicals he made in the 30s with his wife Liubov Orlova, the greatest star of the period, would have been more germane to her purposes. And she speeds past the work of women directors such as Vera Stroeva and Iuliia Solntseva.

Parts two and three of *Red Women on the Silver Screen* assess the experience of Russian women through their own words. This inevitably involves a good deal of repetition, but the incisive observations and affecting personal reminiscences of Maia Turovskaia, one of the leading Russian critics, are among the book's best features, as are a vigorous and suggestive recapitulation of Attwood's work in Oksana Bulgakova's persuasive examination of the metamorphoses of the Soviet film heroine up to the 70s and Marina Drozdova's consideration of women's sublimation in the films of the last 20 years.

In the final chapter, interviews with women working in the now ex-Soviet cinema provide a fascinating document of vicissitudes lightly borne, as the women patiently explain how their experience of the 'double burden' of work and domestic duties has made them cautious about espousing western feminist agendas in the Russian context. And almost all emphatically reject the 'ghettoising' solution of women's cinema. *Red Women* provides a tentative and partial examination of its subject. There are too many omissions and errors for it to be an entirely reliable guide, but as it grows in polyphonic vitality, it becomes an appealing record of the achievements of some remarkable women.

The symbolisation of women by male artists assessed by Attwood is a feature of the work of Andrei Tarkovsky, and Peter Green is illuminating on the subject in *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest*, demonstrating how in most of the director's films women are reduced to subordinate roles as mother, wife or lover of the male hero.

Making judicious use of Tarkovsky's own writings, especially *Sculpting in Time* and the diaries, *Time Within Time*, and the work of Maia Turovskaia, Green has produced an attentive and eloquent survey of Tarkovsky's career. He reveals the director's evolving attitude to the use of music and sound, colour and lighting. He identifies his major visual motifs, including the use of such painters as Bruegel and Leonardo, and persuasively elucidates their accretion of associative power. He considers Tarkovsky's obsessive circling around the themes of time and memory, identity and dream. He carefully examines the persistence of autobiographical elements.

Gradually, and it is one of the strengths of his book, Green reveals the oeuvre as a mass of fine interconnections, echoings and elaborations. *Andrei Tarkovsky: The Winding Quest* is a work of quiet authority, informed by the author's sober but not uncritical admiration of his subject's towering achievement.

Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film 1960-1990

Paul Julian Smith, Oxford University Press, £10.95, 239pp

Smith investigates a range of Hispanic texts, raising challenging questions about homosexuality and its representations during a key period in Spanish writing when gay identities came to the fore. The book includes chapters on Eloy de la Iglesia and Pedro Almodóvar which draw on original archival research and pay particular attention to cinematic form, and concludes with an analysis of *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* which examines nationality, gender and class.

Set Pieces: Being About Film Stills Mostly

Daniel Meadows, BFI Publishing, £12.95, 120pp

Stills photographer Meadows' quirky personal reminiscences about his involvement in several recent British films and television series. Candid shots are combined with studio portraits (Yehudi Menuhin, below) to reveal the workings of a fascinating and little documented aspect of the film-making process. Beautifully illustrated in colour and black and white, the book is as much about the business of marketing films as about the art of stills photography.



The Casablanca Man:

The Cinema of Michael Curtiz

James C. Robertson, Routledge, £25, 202pp

In the first full-scale study of the director, Robertson follows Curtiz's career through the years spent in Hungary and Austria, concentrating on the period between 1926 and 1961 when he worked in the US. Drawing on unpublished material from the Warner Bros archives, Robertson offers a major reassessment of the work of one of Hollywood's most versatile film-makers.

Ugetsu: Kenji Mizoguchi, Director

Keiko I. McDonald (ed), Rutgers University Press, \$14, 176pp

Another in the series *Films in Print*, which also includes such titles as *My Darling Clementine*, *Breathless* and *Touch of Evil*, the book contains the continuity script, credits and cast details contextualised by reviews and commentaries on this widely acclaimed masterpiece of Japanese cinema. McDonald's introduction analyses the complex cultural issues revealed by the film, while the complete texts of the two Japanese tales on which it is based provide essential background information.

You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men

Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), Lawrence and Wishart, £14.99, 221pp

A collection of articles by male writers exploring the pleasures and perils of representations of men and masculinity in popular cinema. Richard Dyer discusses Rock Hudson's heterosexual persona, Joe Fisher looks at Clark Gable's balls, Ashwani Sharma writes about Amitabh Bachchan, star of Indian Bombay cinema, and Andy Medhurst relishes Dirk Bogarde's ambiguously aberrant image in *The Spanish Gardener*.

REVIEWS

Reviews, synopses and full credits for all the month's new films and new British TV films

Anglagård (House of Angels)

Sweden 1992

Director: Colin Nutley

Certificate

15

Distributor

Mayfair Entertainment

Production Company

Memfis Film

In association with
Sveriges Television,
TV2 Göteborg/Svenska
Filminstitutet/
Danmarks Radio/Norsk
Broadcasting/Nordisk
Film & TV Fund

Producers

Lars Jönsson
Swedish Television:
Lars Dahlquist

Production Manager

Ann Collenberg

Unit Managers

Martina Stöhr
Annika Holmberg

Screenplay

Colin Nutley

Director of Photography

Jens Fischer

Editor

Perry Schaffer

Production Designer

Ulla Herdin

Music

Björn Isfält

Music Performed by

Piano:
Göran Martling

Laszio Horvath

Music Advisers

Göran Martling

Laszio Horvath

Wardrobe

Sven Lunden

Britt-Marie Larsson

Make-up

John "Janne" Kindahl

Sound Editors

Eddie Axberg

Lasse Liljeholm

Sound Recordists

Åsa Lindgren-

Davidsson

Berndt Frithiof

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordist

Dawn Baker

Stunts

Rolf "Nicke" Niklasson

Cast

Helena Bergström

Fanny

Rikard Wolff

Zac

Sven Wollter

Axel Flogfalt

Reine Brynolfsson

Fleming Collmert

Ernst Gunter

Gottfried Petterson

Viveka Seldahl

Rut Flogfalt

Per Oscarsson

Erik Zander

Tord Peterson

Ivar Petterson

Ing-Marie Carlsson

Eva Agren

Jan Myrbrand

Per-Ove Agren

Peter Andersson

Görel Crona

Jakob Eklund

Gabriella Boris

Johannes Brost

Göran Martling

Tomas Schwabe

Carl-Einar Häckner

Kaj Noura

Scottie Preston

Jerk Rysjö

Kim Åström

Alice Braun

Tabo Matsoela

Kitty Castillo

Norman Charles

Annika Knutsson

10,747 feet

119 minutes

Subtitles

A small village in Western Sweden. No sooner has eccentric widower Erik Zander presented his will to the local solicitor, Ragnar, than he is killed in a bizarre motor accident involving the parish priest. The man who owns the neighbouring farm, Axel Flogfalt, can barely disguise his glee at the prospect of getting his hands on the valuable surrounding woodland at the forthcoming auction.

He and his wife are shocked when an heir appears out of nowhere to take up the claim: Erik's mysterious granddaughter Fanny. A cabaret artiste, she arrives mid-funeral on the back of a Harley Davidson with her leather-clad friend Zac. The small, insular community is immediately scandalised by Fanny's bleach-blond appearance and forthright behaviour. She and Zac move into the Zander house. Fanny is prepared to sell, but the alacrity with which Axel makes his offer gives her pause. She is also sure that one of the villagers is her father, though her mother never revealed his identity.

The most likely candidate is the taciturn Ivar Petterson, who lives with his brother Gottfried. Ivar won't be drawn, but Fanny befriends Gottfried, who is happy to recollect the golden summer days before Fanny's mother quit the village so suddenly. Many of the other villagers, however, are not so amiable. Local housewives are jealous of the attention she attracts from their menfolk, and the Flogfalts are particularly vituperative in their condemnation.

The antipathy is such that the parish priest feels he has to intervene. He inveigles Fanny and Zac to invite their friends from the cabaret circuit to put on a show in the church, so that the villagers may understand and appreciate what they do. Despite its outré nature, the show is a great success, and the community is reconciled. Mrs Flogfalt is moved to show her husband a letter nearly three decades old. It is from Fanny's mother to the father of her daughter - Axel. Fanny sells him the land and determines to get back to her career, but she keeps the house so that she may return.

British-born director Colin Nutley must now consider himself a Swedish film-maker. After a brief career in TV in this country (most notoriously the series *Annika*, about a Swedish au pair), he moved to Sweden to make a series of documentaries, one of which inspired this, his third local feature film. One would be hard put to identify a specifically 'British' intelligence at work here, although it is probably worth pointing out that the movie concerns an insular community coming to terms with a foreign interloper, and one who works in showbiz at that (Fanny and Zac work the cabaret circuit in Germany).

The theme is a familiar one, and the treatment is nothing if not leisurely. Nutley pictures a warm pastoral idyll, and gears his film to a suitably rural pace. Even the bizarre motor accident which instigates the action takes place at no more than 30 mph. This may be a study of small-town bigotry, but the director's instincts are generous: he allows his characters their foibles. That said, at about half an hour too long, the film cannot really afford its sketchy development, and it is seriously let down by the facile homilies which comprise Nutley's dramatically suspect conclusion. The local priest painstakingly spells out the relevant lesson - love thy neighbour - before taking the unconventional step of handing over his church to a troupe of drag artists and cabaret performers in the (vindicated) belief that they will win over his conservative congregation. Even Nutley must have entertained doubts about such a schmaltzy showbiz epiphany, since he cuts away from the performance for an equally phoney climax in which a degenerate villager attempts to burn down the Zander farm - the extent of this character might be summed up, *Dances With Wolves*-style, as 'Impotent Dramatic Scapegoat who Watches Porn.'

Tom Charity

The Assassin

USA 1993

Director: John Badham

Certificate

18

Distributor

Warner Bros

Production Company

Warner Bros

Producer

Art Linson

Co-producer

James Herbert

Associate Producers

D.J. Caruso

David Sosna

Production Associates

Jonathan Brandstein

Patti Roberts Nelson

Production Manager

James Herbert

Location Managers

William T. Schneider

Deborah Laub

Steven Shkolnik

2nd Unit Director

D.J. Caruso

Casting

Bonnie Timmermann

Assistant Directors

David Sosna

Ronnie Chong

Carla McCloskey

David L. D'Ovido

Tracy Rosenthal

Screenplay

Robert Getchell

Alexandra Seros

Based on the film

Nikita by Luc Besson

Director of Photography

Michael Watkins

Panavision

Colour

Technicolor

2nd Unit Director of Photography

Michael Ferris

Camera Operators

Richard T. Vanik

Randy Nolen

Roland E. High

Eric D. Andersen

Aaron Pazanti

Editor

Frank Morris

Production Designer

Philip Harrison

Art Director

Sydney Z. Litwack

Set Design

Eric W. Orbom

James Bayliss

Sally Thornton

Roger G. Fortune

Set Decorator

Julia Laughlin

Special Effects

Ken Pepiot

Co-ordinator

Albert Delgado

Larz Anderson

Thomas R. Ward

Gintar Repecka

Robert L. Olmstead

Kelly Kerby

Peter Albiez

Gary L. Karas

Music

Hans Zimmer

Additional:

Nick Glennie-Smith

Music Editors

Alex Gibson

Sherry Whitfield

Songs

"Wild is the Wind"

by Ned Washington,

Dimitri Tiomkin,

performed by Nina

Simone; "I Want a

Little Sugar in My

Bowl" by and

performed by Nina

Simone; "Everglade"

by Jennifer Finch,

Daniel Ray, performed

by L7; "Feeling Good"

by Leslie Bricusse,

Anthony Newley,

performed by Nina Simone; "Here Comes the Sun" by George Harrison, performed by Nina Simone; "Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair" performed by Nina Simone; "Cuando Calienta el Sol" by Carlos Rigual, Mario Rigual, Carlos Alberto Martinoli, performed by Vikki Carr; "Zydeco Boogaloo" by Stanley Dural Jnr, performed by Buckwheat Zydeco; "Co-Fet?" by and performed by John Delafosse; "Happy Birthday to You" by Patty S. Hill, Mildred J. Hill; "Entertainment City" by and performed by Harry Perry

Costume Design

Marlene Stewart

Wardrobe Supervisor

Eduardo Castro

Make-up

Lizbeth Williamson

Kimberly Felix

Title Design

Wayne Fitzgerald

Supervising Sound Editors

William L. Manger

Dale Johnston

Richard Oswald

James J. Isaacs

Solange Schwalbe-

Boisseau

Sound Recordist

Willie D. Burton

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

Wayne Artman

Tom Dahl

Frank Jones

Technical Advisers

Police:

Randy Walker

Medical:

Linda Klein

Stunt Co-ordinator

Mic Rodgers

Stunts

Cheryl Wheeler-Dixon

Shane Dixon

Manny Perry

R.A. Rondell

Steve Chambers

Keith Tellez

Dan Wynands

Ronald R. Rondell

Joyce McNeal

Annie Ellis

Weapons Specialist

Tony Didio Jnr

Cast

Bridget Fonda

Maggie

Gabriel Byrne

Bob

Dermot Mulroney

J.P.

Miguel Ferrer

Kaufman

Anne Bancroft

Amanda

Olivia D'Abo

Angela

Richard Romanus

Fahd Bahktiar

Harvey Keitel

Victor the Cleaner

Lorraine Toussaint

Beth

Geoffrey Lewis

Drugstore Owner

Mic Rodgers

Cop

Michael Rapaport

Big Stan

Ray Oriel

Burt

Spike McClure

Johnny D

Lieux Dressler
Johnny's Mother
John Capodice
Detective
Carmen Zapata
Judge
Calvin Levels
Computer Instructor
Michael Runyard
Weapons Instructor
Bill M. Ryusaki
Karate Instructor
Jan Speck
Kaufman's Assistant
Francesco Messina
Waiter
Peter Mark Vasquez
Guard
Wendy L. Davies
Shopping Woman
James Handy
Operative
Lee Dupree
Man with Gun
David Sosna
Operative with Headset
Bruce Barnes
New Orleans Thug

Jaqueline Koch
VIP
Kenny Endoso
Gary Kasper
Angela's Bodyguards
Rosalind Jue
Maid
Eric Cohen
Valet
Francois Chau
Building Security
Guard
Joe Garcia
Hassan
Frank Girardeau
Policeman
Clark Heathcliffe Brolly
Jodie Markell
Students
Robert Harvey
Police Detective
Harry Perry
Venice Guitar Player

9,734 feet
108 minutes

US title: Point of No Return

A group of young junkies raids a chemist's shop, and in the ensuing shoot-out with the police, all the thieves are killed except for one girl, Maggie. When a policeman finds her, she shoots him dead. The uncontrollably rebellious young woman is sentenced to death by lethal injection, but wakes up to find herself still alive. A man, Bob, gives her the choice of death or working as a special government assassin. Reluctantly, she agrees to work with him.

After one escape attempt, Maggie embarks on a tough training course. She also has lessons from an elegant woman, Amanda, on social graces. Initially uncooperative, she finally heeds death threats. One night, she is allowed out to a restaurant with Bob but this turns out to be her final test. She has to kill one of the diners, then escape by a route Bob describes to her. His instructions are false and she narrowly escapes. On her return, Bob, who is clearly falling in love with her, tells her that she is ready to go out into the world as Claudia (codename Nina), a computer saleswoman, in Venice, Los Angeles. There she falls in love with her apartment caretaker J.P., who is puzzled that she will not tell him anything about her past. One day, she is called by her department to deliver a bomb to a hotel suite.

She meets Bob who makes her invite him round for dinner, where he indulges in macho sparring with J.P. Bob gives Maggie two airline tickets for New Orleans at Mardi Gras. After carrying out another killing, she asks Bob to let her go. He agrees on condition that she does one final job: she has to imitate the girlfriend of a rich crook, Fahd Bahktiar, who is selling nuclear secrets to the Middle East, steal his information database and kill him. It all goes wrong when Maggie's colleague and Bahktiar's girlfriend are both shot. Victor, the 'cleaner', is called in to dispose of the bodies in acid and help Maggie kill Bahktiar. She accomplishes her mission and drives off with Victor. But she grows suspicious of his behaviour and a fight ensues. The car becomes lodged halfway off a cliff and Victor falls to his death. Maggie spends the

night with J.P. but in the morning, when Bob arrives, she has disappeared. He glimpses her walking down a road and reports to his boss that she died in the car accident.

This latest Hollywood remake of a European movie copies Luc Besson's *Nikita* scene by scene, decor by decor and colour by colour. In fact, much of the time, it seems to be no more than a very expensive dubbing job. Besson's chill, electric-blue opening scene is there, complete with a very loud rock track and the helpful addition of a neon sign proclaiming "drugs" - in case the new American audience is wondering what's wrong with the ragged bunch making their way down the street. *Nikita's* - now *Nina's* - white cell is reproduced down to the tiniest graffitied detail; even the clothes look exactly the same.

But where Besson adeptly manufactured style out of no substance, Badham plods through the film with the palpable anxiety to reproduce it so faithfully that it loses any spirit it might have had. Even the hyperactive, protracted kitchen fight, surely owing something to John Woo, in which *Nina* escapes after her first assassination, comes across as uninspired imitation.

But, oddly enough, *The Assassin* turns out to be a surprisingly watchable movie. The reason is the inspired casting of Bridget Fonda. Where Anne Parillaud's *Nikita* was no more than a transparent pretty-girl-with-gun male fantasy, Fonda is perky and tough, and even, at moments, almost tragic. She may have started out as a grinning doll in films like *Shag*, but she has turned into a fine actress who makes you want to believe that there are dramas raging beneath that defiant chin. She also turns Parillaud's pouting affectations into something altogether more appealing: Maggie's confusion over what to buy in the supermarket, leading her to follow a shopper around and copy her in bulk, is played as coy comedy tinged with beguiling pathos.

But even Fonda has difficulty keeping her balance when faced with the prospect of Anne Bancroft as Amanda, the svelte teacher who turns the ugly duckling into a swan. The essential emptiness of Amanda's platitudes is

picked up once, later in the film, when Fonda, faced with danger, finds herself chillingly repeating one of them. But we are simply asked to accept, without seeing it, the surrogate mother/daughter relationship between the two women; and what could have been one of the most telling - and emotional - aspects of Maggie's 'awakening' is glossed over. Jeanne Moreau, at least, brought to the original part the husky sexiness of a brothel madame, making it easier to see why she would be alluring to *Nikita*. But Bancroft is too much like someone's smart aunt.

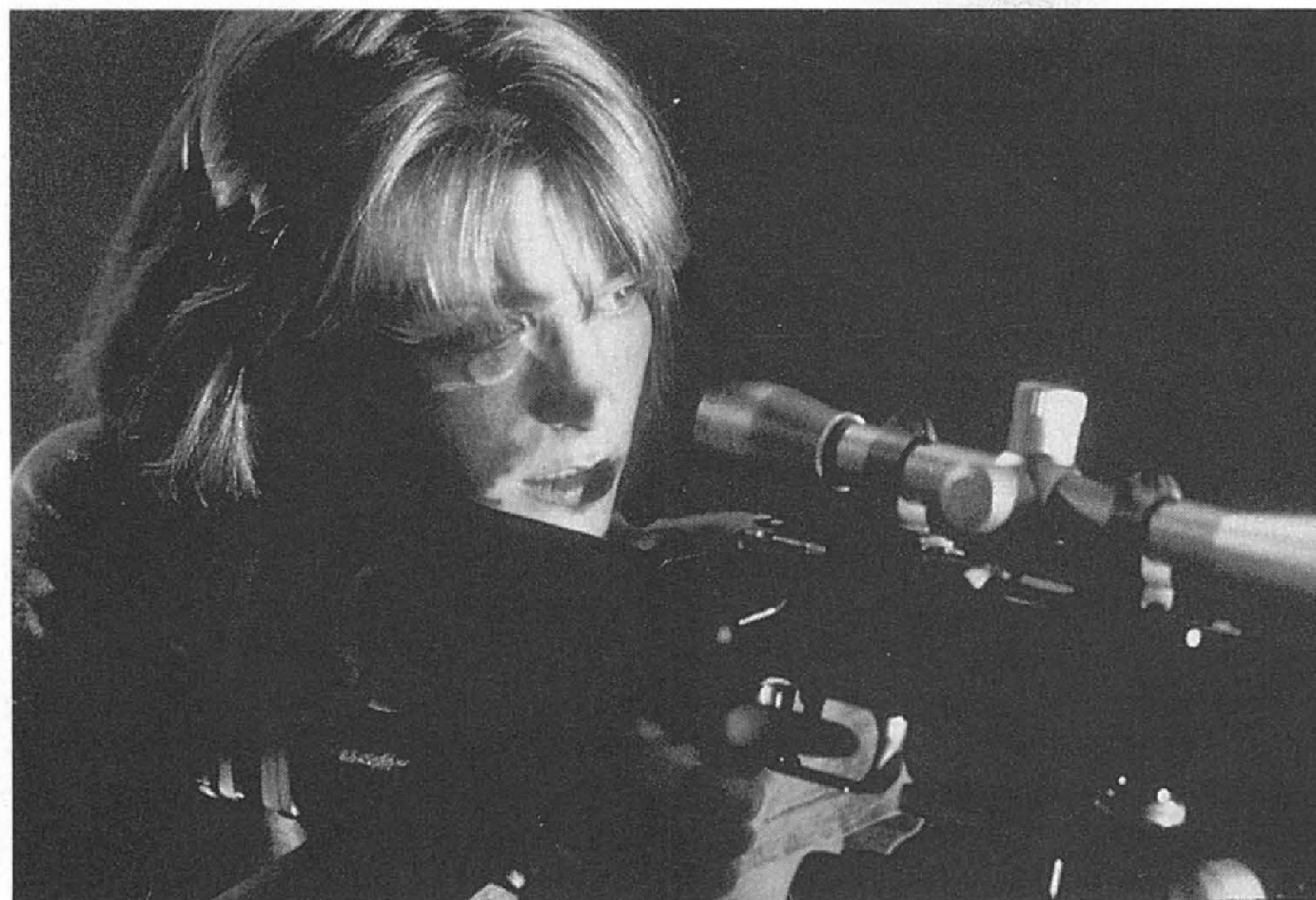
Nina Simone may be delighted that she has finally received Hollywood recognition, not just on the soundtrack but in the 'Nina' motif that runs through the film (Maggie is code-named after her favourite singer). But the whole business is so overplayed that it soon turns what is apparently supposed to be sophisticated magic into cutesy bathos. When Ms Simone's music represents a pearl in the early Maggie oyster - a symbol of Bob's love for Maggie, a hazy memory of Maggie's mother and a representation of Maggie herself - you wonder at the paucity of imagination involved.

As Bob, Gabriel Byrne is suave, distant and inimitably romantic, though hampered by a bizarre semi-Scottish accent. His sparring scene with the pip-squeak J.P. is one of the film's few deft touches, funny in a breezy, ironic American way. But (perhaps because, while *Nikita's* director meant to identify with Bob, Badham cannot) Byrne never quite gets the chance to be the brooding spiritual presence in *Nina's* life that he should be - and another area of conflict is diluted.

The second most appealing piece of casting is Harvey Keitel's deadly killer, who stomps impassively through his small, surreal portion of the movie with sheer brilliance; funny and horrific by turn, though hardly stretching his capabilities.

The Assassin says no more and no less than its glam predecessor, but its fidelity has one major advantage: that at least, unlike numerous other remakes, the temptation to tamper with the very poignantly French ending is overcome.

Amanda Lipman



Not quite *Nikita*: Bridget Fonda

Benny and Joon

USA 1993

Director: Jeremiah Chechik

Certificate
12
Distributor
UIP
Production Company
MGM
Executive Producer
Bill Badalato
Producer
Susan Arnold
Donna Roth
Associate Producer
Leslie McNeil
Production Co-ordinator
Barbara A. Hall
Unit Manager
Bill Badalato
Unit Production Manager
Bill Badalato
Location Manager
Bruce Lawhead
Casting
Risa Bramon Garcia
Heidi Levitt
Additional:
Montgomery/
Parada Casting
Rick Montgomery
Extras:
Joseph Pisani
Assistant Directors
K.C. Colwell
Bruce Carter
Screenplay
Barry Berman
Story
Barry Berman
Leslie McNeil
Director of Photography
John Schwartzman
Colour
DeLuxe
2nd Unit Director of Photography
Mark R. Streapy
Camera Operator
C. Mitchell Amundsen
Opticals
Pacific Title
Editor
Carol Littleton
Production Designer
Neil Spisak
Art Director
Pat Tagliaferro
Set Decorator
Barbara Munch
Set Dressers
J. Michael Davis
Peter Hoobyar
Storyboard Artist
John Jensen
Special Effects Co-ordinator
J.D. Streett IV
Fire Effects Co-ordinator
Alan Hall
Music
Rachel Portman
Music Director
J.A.C. Redford
Music Performed by
Solo Clarinet:
Jim Kanter
Solo Soprano
Saxophone:
Dan Higgins
Orchestrations
Rachel Portman
Music Supervisor
Allan Mason
Music Editor
Bill Abbott
Music Consultants
Jackie Krost
Sharyl Churchill
Songs
"I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" by Charles Reid, Craig Reid, performed by The Proclaimers; "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" by and performed by Joe "Pinetop" Perkins; "Pushin' Forward Back" by Christopher J. Cornell, Stone Gossard, Jeff Ament, performed by Temple of the Dog; "Have a Little Faith in Me" by and performed by John Hiatt; "Can't Find My Way Home" by Steve Winwood, performed by Joe Cocker

Physical Comedy
Sequences Choreography
Dan Kamin
Costume Design
Aggie Guerard Rodgers
Costume Supervisor
Chuck Velasco
Key Make-up
Patty York
Title Design
Pittard/Sullivan/
Fitzgerald
Supervising Sound Editors
J. Paul Huntsman
John Haeny
Dialogue Editors
Adam Sawelson
Matthew Sawelson
Pat McCormick
Ralph Osborn
Supervising ADR Editor
Kimberly Harris
ADR Editor
Jessica Gallavan
Foley Editors
Lucy Coldsnow
Jeff Rosen
Sound Recordists
James Thornton
Scott Austin
ADR:
Michael J. Cerone
Music:
John Richards
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recordists
Gary Bourgeois
Scott Millan
Elmo Ponsdomenech
ADR:
Paul J. Zydel
Music:
John Richards
Sound Effects Editor
Myron Nettinga
Stunt Co-ordinator
Noon Orsatti

Cast
Johnny Depp
Sam
Mary Stuart Masterson
Joon Pearl
Aidan Quinn
Benny Pearl
Julianne Moore
Ruthie
Oliver Platt
Eric
C.C.H. Pounder
Doctor Garvey
Dan Hedaya
Thomas
Joe Grifasi
Mike
William H. Macy
Randy Burch
Liane Alexandra Curtis
Claudia
Eileen Ryan
Mrs Smail
Don Hamilton
UPS Man
Waldo Larson
Walter
Irvin Johnson
Shane Nilsson
Orderlies
Leslie Laursen
Admitting Nurse
Faye Killebrew
Video Customer
Ramsin Amirhas
Video Clerk
Lynette Walden
Female Customer
Amy Alizabeth Sanford
Young Joon
Brian Keavy
Young Benny
John Grant Phillips
Policeman
Tony Lincoln
Local
Noon Orsatti
Dan Kamin
Patrons

8,873 feet
99 minutes

Joon Pearl, a mentally disturbed woman in her early twenties, is bright, highly verbal and an enthusiastic painter. She shares a home with her older brother Benny, a car mechanic, who takes care of her. One evening Benny finds Joon throwing something at the part-time housekeeper, who announces her resignation, leaving Joon with no daytime carer. During Benny's weekly poker game, one of his friends, Mike, complains about his cousin Sam, who is boarding with him, and jokingly suggests palming off Sam on Benny as a 'housekeeper'. Joon's psychiatrist Dr Garvey tries to persuade Benny that Joon would be better off in a home. During the next poker game, Mike's bid is that Benny should take Sam off his hands. Mike wins, and Benny and Joon acquire Sam as a member of their household. Benny, Joon and Sam go to a diner, where Sam's plate-skimming and food-juggling skills attract the attention of the waitress, Ruthie.

Benny gets to know Ruthie through Sam and Joon's developing friendship. When he drives her home after a visit she invites him in for a beer; he refuses, but asks her out to dinner. Dr Garvey reminds Benny to tell Joon about his plans to put her in a home; Benny asks for her admission to be deferred. His date with Ruthie goes well, but once again he refuses to come in for a drink and she is hurt by what she sees as a brush-off. Benny's moroseness contrasts with Joon and Sam's increasing happiness, particularly on a trip to the park, where Sam's brilliant clowning draws a crowd, enchants Joon and dramatically raises Benny's opinion of him. That night, Sam and Joon make love, but Joon asks Sam not to tell Benny. Benny arranges an audition for Sam but when he tells Joon and Sam, Joon is upset and Sam is silent. Sam tells Benny about their relationship; Benny reacts violently, and throws Sam out. Joon protests; Benny refuses to listen and shows her the brochure for the home.

That night Joon sends Benny out to buy food while she and Sam, intending to run away, catch the night bus. Without her medication, Joon has a seizure and is taken to the mental hospital, accompanied by Sam. At the hospital, Benny is told Joon won't see him and doesn't want to leave. He sees Sam waiting in reception, and reacts violently again. Sam is visited by a penitent Benny, asking for help in getting to see Joon. They finally gain admission and Benny apologises to Joon, offering her the chance to try living independently. Joon agrees that she'd like to try living in her own flat, and Dr Garvey signs her release papers. Benny is tentatively reunited with Ruthie; and Joon starts her new life in the flat next to Ruthie's, frequently accompanied by Sam.

The idea that getting it together with Johnny Depp is an effective therapy for mental illness certainly holds more appeal than, say, *Rain Man's* vision of enforced contact with an autistic brother as a cure for 80s mate-



Family viewing: Mary Stuart Masterson, Julianne Moore, Johnny Depp

realistic values. Hollywood's recent fondness for expropriating mental illness or impairment as a metaphor – homogenising a host of disabilities into a state of innocence which cleanses flawed or corrupt 'normality' – is not entirely absent from *Benny and Joon*, but at least the tone of former clown Barry Berman's debut script is more knowingly comic than self-righteous. "Benjamin, don't underestimate the mentally ill," Joon warns her brother when she suspects him of cheating at table tennis. But Joon's smart remark has an all-too-predictable double meaning – with the uncanny perceptiveness Hollywood likes to impute to the 'challenged', she has subliminally sussed Benny's plans to betray her by putting her in a home. This inconsistency between endowing her character with real offbeat wit and originality (she dislikes raisins, she explains to Sam, because "they've had their life stolen ... they taste sweet, but really they're humiliated grapes"), then falling back on the low-risk liberal clichés of the American mental illness movie is symptomatic of the film's slightly unsatisfactory hybrid nature.

Unfortunately, *Benny and Joon's* likeable but flawed magical realist script is weighed down by unmagical direction. Excellent central performances do much to compensate, and the end result has some unusual strengths – an offbeat blue-collar milieu where poker is played not to win cash but to get rid of unwanted household items, and a no-fuss portrayal of the psychological effects of being a carer (Benny's confusion, self-denial and lack of social confidence after 12 years of caring for Joon are superbly conveyed by Quinn). Depp's precision clowning makes for some moments of great visual comedy: as he punts across the kitchen using a mop as a pole and mimes his way into a job in a video store, his role looks increasingly like a consolation prize for not getting to play Chaplin. But Jeremiah Chechik's apprenticeship directing *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* (his sole previous feature) and

Hall and Oates videos for MTV has clearly taken its toll; moments of high emotion (Sam and Joon weepily make out on her studio floor) and moral reflection (Benny broods next to a moving goods train) are reduced to a rock-video bathos made worse by blasts of John Hiatt and Joe Cocker on the soundtrack.

This directorial heavy-handedness exacerbates the feel-good attitude to mental problems. For instance, the title sequence establishes that Joon is Artistic But Unbalanced by having her paint an impassioned impasto abstract and then destructively smear her hands across the canvas. Her other symptoms include making milkshakes with strange (though not inedible) ingredients while wearing a snorkel, and a pyromaniac tendency when crossed. When Sam confronts Benny with the 'controversial' view that "apart from being a little mentally ill, Joon is pretty normal," we are likely to agree, but not for the reason intended. The implied cause of Joon's condition is as fudged as the cure. A hint in a flashback that her mental distress may have originated in the death of both parents in a road accident makes a crucial difference to our acceptance of the premise that Sam's emotional healing might make her 'well'; yet it remains unclarified.

To its credit, the film makes a belated point (during the getaway attempt which precipitates Joon's hospitalisation) of showing that Sam is no substitute for her regular medication. But by this stage in the story his role as catalyst and twin soul has been so strongly established (we know he's a kindred spirit the moment he starts tasting paint from Joon's canvas and making toast by ironing the bread) that our final impression is that Sam and Joon are just a couple of kooks whose problems are resolved by falling in love. In this fantasy of mutually protective innocence, only the 'normal' Benny is required to confront the complex struggles of adult life.

Claire Monk

Boxing Helena

USA 1993

Director: Jennifer Chambers Lynch

Certificate

18

Distributor

Entertainment

Production Company

Main Line Pictures

Executive Producers

James R. Schaeffer

Larry Sugar

Producers

Carl Mazzone

Philippe Caland

Line Producers

Laurel Ayn Selko

Brigitte Caland

Production Co-ordinators

Amy Stevens

LA:

Richard B.L. Fleming

Production Consultant

David Kappes

Location Manager

Jamal Henry

Post-production Co-ordinator

David Finfer

Casting

Ferne Cassel

Assistant Directors

Josh King

Marcel Brubaker

Rhonda Guthrie

Screenplay

Jennifer Chambers

Lynch

Story

Philippe Caland

Director of Photography

Frank Byers

Panavision

Colour

Technicolor

Additional Photography

Steven Fierberg

Video Playback

David Trenkle

Editor

David Finfer

Art Director

Paul Huggins

Set Decorator

Sharon Braunstein

Set Dressers

Karen Young

Linda Kay Beckstein

Illustrator

Tom Cranham

Scenic Artists

Steven Kerlagon

Mary Lou Harmon

Katherine "Kat" Speers

Special Effects

Bob Shelley's

Special Effects

Venus:

Fantasy II Film

Effects Inc.

Helena's Box Design

John Gaughan

Helena's Wheelchair

Design

Michael's Classic

Wicker

Music

Graeme Revell

Music Extracts

"Nessun Dorma"

by Giacomo Puccini;

"Brandenburg

Concertos 3" by

Johann Sebastian Bach;

"Piano Concerto 25"

by Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart; "La Bohème"

by Giacomo Puccini

Female Vocals

Bobbi Page

Music Supervisor

Peter Afterman

Music Editor

Dick Bernstein

Songs

"You're Nobody 'Till

Somebody Loves You"

by L. Stock, J.

Cavanaugh, R. Morgan,

performed by Cab

Calloway; "It Ain't Over

Till It's Over" by and

performed by Lenny

Kravitz; "Woman in

Chains" by Roland

Orzabal, performed

by Tears for Fears;

"O Mio Babbino Caro"

by Giacomo Puccini,

performed by Andre

Kostelanetz and his

Orchestra; "Musetta's

Waltz" performed

by Andre Kostelanetz

and his Orchestra;

"Sadness" by Curly

M.C., F. Gregorian,

David Fairstein,

performed by Enigma;

"I Can't Make You

Love Me" by M. Reid,

A. Shamblin,

performed by Venice

Wardrobe Supervisor

Patsy Chaney

Make-up Artist

Nina Port

Hair Stylist

Candida Conery

Prosthetics

Bill "Splat" Johnson

Main Title Design

Huck Penzell

Titles and Opticals

The Title House

Supervising Sound Editor

Dane A. Davis

Sound Editors

Kimberly Lowe Voigt

Martin J. Bram

ADR Supervisor

G.W. Brown

Foley Editors

Tom Hammond

Kurt N. Forshager

Sound Recordists

J. Bayard Carey

Brion Paccassi

ADR Recordist

David Jobe

Foley Recordists

Tami Treadwill

Tommy Goodwin

Ultra Stereo

consultants:

Daniel W. Victor Jnr

Brian Slack

Sound Re-recordists

Ken S. Polk

Robert Thirlwell

Sound Effects Editors

Todd Toon

Kini Kay

Foley Artists

Ossama Khuluki

Catherine A. Harper

Visual Consultants

Jon Hutman

Chris Horner

Stunt Co-ordinator

Lonnie Smith

Cast
Julian Sands
 Nick Cavanaugh
Sherilyn Fenn
 Helena
Bill Paxton
 Ray O'Malley
Kurtwood Smith
 Doctor Alan Harrison
Art Garfunkel
 Doctor Lawrence
 Augustine
Betsy Clark
 Anne Garrett
Bryan Smith
 Russell
Nicolette Scorsese
 Fantasy lover/Nurse
Meg Register
 Marion Cavanaugh
Marla Levine
 Patricia
Kim Lentz
 Nurse Diane
Lloyd T. Williams
 Sam
Carl Mazzone
 Pastor

Erik Shoaff
 Uncle Charlie
Lisa Oz
 Flower Shop Girl
Ted Manson
 Mailman
Adele K. Schaeffer
 Amy Levin
 Flashback Party
 Women
Matt Berry
 Young Nick Cavanaugh

9,448 feet
105 minutes

On the day of his mother's funeral, Dr Nick Cavanaugh – who was humiliated by her as a child – leaves the cemetery to go to the hospital and perform a life-saving operation. Meeting his friend Dr Lawrence Augustine in a bar, he glimpses Helena, a woman with whom he has been besotted, and rushes outside to avoid her. Having decided to move straight into his mother's house, he goes there to meet his girlfriend Anne, but ends up spying on Helena while she has sex with her boyfriend Ray. Helena throws Ray out and makes plans to go away, but first she goes to Nick's housewarming party, where she treats him with disdain. Nick makes such a fool of himself over her that Anne walks out on him. The next day, he tricks Helena into coming to his house. When she realises this, she tries to run away and is knocked down by a passing car.

Regaining consciousness, she finds out that Nick, who is tending to her solicitously, has amputated both her legs. They begin a relationship as loving jailer and angry prisoner, though not before Nick has given up his job to a fellow doctor who discovers what is happening. As Nick – beset with memories of his mocking, sexy mother – cuts himself off from the world to be with Helena, Ray starts hunting for her and Anne tries unsuccessfully to make it up with Nick through sex. Nick then cuts off Helena's arms and makes her watch while he has sex with a prostitute. Finally, Helena admits that she loves him and wants him. Just as they are about to make love, Ray bursts in and attacks Nick, who is knocked out. When he regains consciousness, he is in hospital. He visits Helena and it becomes clear that the whole story has been a dream – that after she was knocked down, he brought her to hospital where she was operated on, and that she still has her limbs.

It is certainly a bad sign when a film's biggest claim to fame hangs on the fact that both Madonna and Kim Basinger nearly got involved with it – the latter enough to leave her with a big bill for bailing out too late. But even if the two stars in question

have made their own share of inexcusably poor movies, they have shown good sense in not getting involved with this one.

Having established its titular premise, as Fenn's gaudy Helena is 'boxed' by having her legs and then her arms cut off by the adoring but mad Dr Julian Sands, the film goes resolutely nowhere. He dresses her up and feeds her; she mocks his sexual inadequacy. A few characters who have the potential to play pivotal roles disappear. Instead, there are endless short scenes charting bits of daily life, and video-style music breaks that patently play for time. It soon becomes clear that the idea has reached its stunted fruition.

Just how to react to the film is another problem: most of it is so ponderously serious that it's laughable. Though there are plenty of potentially camp elements, from the situation itself to Sands' aesthete-cum-surgeon, they are all given a determinedly puffed and heavy-handed treatment. Why does Nick have sexual problems and crazed obsessions? Cut to images of his louche, leering mother – courtesy of Freud, by way of unreconstructed trashy '50s psychodramas. With what can we equate Helena's limbless state? Why, with that Venus de Milo-esque statue at which the film so helpfully keeps pointing.

In terms of its sexual politics, this is all even odder, when put next to several gratuitous sex scenes and the platitudes that the formerly sharp-tongued Helena starts to spout about women being soft and gentle and wanting to be loved by a big, strong man. The fact that this all turns out to be some kind of wish-fulfilment dream on Nick's part is never used to cancel out the

meaning here, or to put it in any other, more ironic context.

The film is either singularly lacking in irony, or so extraordinarily removed from itself so as to make engaging with it impossible. Not only is the script unbelievably bad – packed with clumsy, forced and often banal dialogue – but some of the acting has to be seen to be believed. Worst, or funniest, of all is Bill Paxton – great as the naive sheriff in *One False Move* – who does a bizarre, leather-clad, lip-curling impersonation of an aging rock star, as Helena's 'wild' boyfriend Ray. Fenn's Helena, (perhaps intentionally) overdressed and overpreened, has a hard job trying to make her sketchy character add up to more than a series of (literally) disjointed utterances. Only Sands seems remotely at ease, playing at his habitual aesthetically fervent madness with an enthusiasm that belies the inanity of his dialogue. His smaller neurotic compulsions – endlessly changing his shirt and washing himself – are more interesting than his larger problems, including, as a bafflingly 'major' plot point, premature ejaculation.

Lynch also borrows bits and pieces from her father David. As if uncertain of its own style, *Boxing Helena* intermittently gives way to white light flashes and menacingly prowling cameras. This would be fine if it added anything to the film. But Lynch would have done better by her movie debut if she had concentrated less on the niceties she has borrowed from psychoanalytical text books and more on essentials like story, script and character. If this were even entertaining, it would be a whole lot more bearable.

Amanda Lipman



Severed relations: Julian Sands, Sherilyn Fenn

Cliffhanger

USA 1993

Director: Renny Harlin

Certificate
 15
Distributor
 Guild
Production Company
 A Cliffhanger BV
 production for
 Carolco/
 Le Studio Canal Plus/
 Pioneer production
 In association with
 RCS Video
Executive Producer
 Mario Kassar
Co-executive Producer
 Lynwood Spinks
Producers
 Alan Marshall
 Renny Harlin
Co-producers
 Gene Patrick Hines
 James R. Zanolokin
 David Rotman
Associate Producers
 Tony Munafo
 Jim Davidson
Production Associate
 Patty Davis
Production Supervisor
 2nd Unit:
 Joel Marx
Production Co-ordinators
 Judith Goodman
 2nd Unit:
 Dawne Alstrom
 Italy Plate Crew:
 Marilyn Nave
Production Manager
 Laura Fattori
Unit Production Manager
 Doug Burdinski
Unit Manager
 Roberto Malerba
Location Managers
 Fabiomassimo
 Dell'Orco
 Emanuele Lomir
 2nd Unit:
 Claudio Carrer
 Enrico Ballarin
 Giovanni Lovatelli
Post-production Supervisor
 Aerial Unit:
 Michael Sweeney
Post-production Co-ordinator
 Noori Dehnahi
2nd Unit Director
 Philip Pfeifer
Casting
 Mindy Marin
Assistant Directors
 Terry Miller
 Michael Viglietta
 2nd Unit:
 Steve Danton
 Albert Cho
 Jeffrey Ellis
Screenplay
 Michael France
 Sylvester Stallone
Screen Story
 Michael France
 Based on a premise
 by John Long
Director of Photography
 Alex Thomson
 Panavision
Colour
 Technicolor
2nd Unit Director of Photography
 Philip Pfeifer
Visual Effects Director
 Neil Krepela
Digital Camera Supervisor
 Robert Luciano
Underwater Photography
 Wayne Baker
Aerial Unit Director of Photography
 Adam Dale
Camera Operators
 David Worley
 B:
 Nicola Pecorini

2nd Unit:
 Ron Hersey
 Mountain Climbing
 Unit:
 David Breashears
 Aerial Unit:
 Mike Kelem
 Optical:
 Ron Longo
 Al Cox
 Matte:
 Al Harding
 Digital:
 Fred Lin
 Animation:
 Bill Hedge
Steadicam Operators
 Nicola Pecorini
 2nd Unit:
 Giovanni Gebbia
Video Playback Operators
 Tim Prince
 2nd Unit:
 Marco Carosi
 Richard Patton
Visual Effects Producers
 Pamela Easley
 Italy Plate Crew:
 Daniel Chuba
Visual Effects Supervisors
 Neil Krepela
 John Bruno
Visual Effects Editors
 Miller Drake
 Italy Plate Crew:
 Michael Moore
Visual Effects Co-ordinator
 Jennifer Bell
Aerial Unit Visual Effects Co-ordinator:
 Crystal Dowd
 Production Supervisor:
 Ellen Somers
 Line Producer:
 Donna Langston
 Art Director:
 Brent Boates
Optical Supervisors
 Aerial Unit:
 Michael Cooper
 Digital:
 Les Dittert
Optical Line-up
 Mary Walter
 Kevin Clark
Optical Co-ordinator
 Kimberly Shriver
Model Shop Supervisor
 David Jones
Matte Department Supervisor
 Michele Moen
Matte Painter
 Rocco Giffre
Digital Effects Supervisors
 Aerial Unit:
 Jim Kygiel
 Italy Plate Crew:
 Kevin O'Neill
Digital Film Opticals
 Digital Magic
 VisionMagic Process
Rotoscope Supervisor
 Annick Therrien
CGI Project Supervisor
 Jay Riddle
CGI Co-ordinator
 Stephen Stanton
CGI Digital Animators
 Andy White
 Joe Alter
 Ira Shain
 Mary McCulloch
 Nina Salerno
 Bonnie Hammer
Editor
 Frank J. Urioste
Production Designer
 John Vallone
Art Directors
 Aurelio Crugnola
 Christiaan Wagener
Set Decorator
 Bob Gould
Set Dresser
 Alessandro Gentili
Conceptual Artist
 John Mann

Draughtsmen

Marco Trentini
Maria Teresa Barbasso
Giulia Chiara Crugnola
Nazzareno Piana
Storyboard Artists
John Mann
Peter S. Mitchel
Special Effects
Co-ordinators
John Richardson
Larry Cavanaugh
Giovanni Corridori
Special Effects
Casey Cavanaugh
Neil Corbuid
Richard Woods
Daniel Acon
Albert Bartoli
Renato Agostini
Massimo Cardajoli
Massimo Cristofanelli
Giovanni Indovino
Duilio Olmi
Claudio Quaglietti
Claudio Savassi
2nd Unit:
John McLeod
Giovanni Indovino
John Marshall
Climber:
Giorgio Zangiacomo
Aerial Unit Forman:
Bill Klinger
Chief Modelmakers
Mike Joyce
Patrick McClung
JetStar Model Sequence
John Richardson
Puppet Sculptor
Laine Liska
Model Shop Co-ordinator
Eric Schneider
Modelmakers
Doug Miller
Jon Warren Jnr
John Ferrari
Alan Faucher
Gerry McClung
Dwight Shook
Gary Rhodabeck
Jeff Kalmus
Music
Trevor Jones
Music Performed by
The London
Philharmonic
Synthesizers:
Trevor Jones
Guy Dagul
Orchestrations
Trevor Jones
Guy Dagul
Brad Dechter
Lawrence Ashmore
Jeff Atmajian
Music Supervisor
Robin Glenn
Music Editor
Dan Carlin Snr
Song
"Do You Need Some?"
by Matt Mercado,
performed by
Mind Bomb
Costume Design
Ellen Mirojnick
Wardrobe Supervisors
Michael "Dixie"
Dennison
2nd Unit:
Reg Samuel
Make-up Supervisor
Jeff Dawn
Make-up Artists
Jim Kail
Maurizio Silvi
Gary Liddiard
2nd Unit:
Maurizio Silvi
Tania McComas
Special Make-up Effects
The Burman Studio
Title Design
Robert Dawson
Titles
Cinema Research
Corporation
Sound Design/Supervisors
Wylie Stateman
Gregg Baxter

Sound Editors

Stuart Copley
Kelly Oxford
ADR Editor
Constance A. Kazmer
Foley Editors
Peter Michael Sullivan
Dino DiMuro
Bruce Elliott
Sound Recordists
Tim Cooney
Music:
John Richards
Roger King
ADR Recordists
Doc Kane
Mike Boudry
Foley Recordists
Jim Ashwill
Nerses Gezalyan
Dolby stereo
consultant:
Douglas Greenfield
Sound Re-recordists
Michael Minkler
Bob Beemer
Sound Effects Supervisor
Scott Gershin
Sound Effects Editors
Frank Smathers
Chris Hogan
Randy Kelley
Mark Lanza
Glenn Morgan
Foley Artists
Gary "Wrecker" Hecker
Dan O'Connell
Mountain Climbing Unit
Technical Adviser
Marco Scholaris
Aerial Unit Technical
Supervisor
Phillip Crescenzo
Stunt Co-ordinators
Joel Kramer
2nd Unit:
Kevin Swigert
Aerial Unit Co-ordinators
Marc Wolff
David Paris
Climbing Co-ordinator
Mike Weis
Stunts
Debbie Evans
Lane Leavitt
Billy Lucas
Lisa McCullough
Georgia Phipps
J. Susan Rampe
Scott Rogers
Kevin Swigert
David Walling
Billy Washington
Stunt Doubles
Sylvester Stallone:
Mark DeAlessandro
Jeff O'Haco
Climbing Doubles:
Wolfgang Guilich
Ron Kauk
Wolf Trainer
Armen Kachikian
Air-to-Air Transfer
Simon Crane

Cast

Sylvester Stallone
Gabe Walker
John Lithgow
Qualen
Michael Rooker
Hal Tucker
Janine Turner
Jessie Deighan
Rex Linn
Travers
Caroline Goodall
Kristel
Leon
Kynette
Craig Fairbass
Delmar
Gregory Scott Cummins
Ryan
Denis Forest
Heldon
Michelle Joyner
Sarah
Max Perlich
Evan
Paul Winfield
Walter Wright
Ralph Walte
Frank
Trey Brownell
Brett
Zach Grenier
Davis

Vyto Ruginis
Matheson
Don Davis
Stuart
Scott Hoxby
Agent Hayes
John Finn
Agent Michaels
Bruce McGill
Treasury Agent
Rosemary Dunsmore
Treasury Secretary
Kim Robillard
Treasury Jet Pilot
Jeff McCarthy
Pilot

Mike Wels
Co-pilot
Duncan Prentice
Treasury Helicopter
Pilot
Kevin Donald
Ray
Jeff Blynn
Marvin
Thor
Thor

10,080 feet
112 minutes

The Rocky Mountains. Rescue team member Gabe Walker attempts but fails to save the life of Sarah, the girlfriend of his partner Hal Tucker. Months later, while treasury officials are ferrying millions of dollars in currency, agent Travers hijacks the money and escapes to another plane, where he joins up with master villain Qualen and gang. But their plane is damaged, and the three suitcases containing the money plummet to the mountains below, where they are scattered. The gang's pilot Kristel crash-lands and fakes a distress call, to which Hal responds. He is joined by Gabe, who had disappeared since Sarah's death but returned under the prompting of helicopter pilot Jessie Deighan.

Gabe and Hal reach the criminals and are taken prisoner. Under duress, they lead the gang to the first suitcase. After Gabe has retrieved the money, Qualen orders him killed, but Gabe escapes, emptying the case into a mini-avalanche before escaping. He joins up with Jessie, who's been alerted by a radio communication from Hal. The two beat Qualen and co, now guided by Hal, to the second suitcase. Gabe escapes the gang, and meets Jessie at a cave where they burn the second load of money for heat.

Next morning, the gang encounters two parachuting teenagers; Qualen has one shot, but the other, Evan, escapes. Gang member Kynette ambushes Gabe at a tower while the gang cross a bridge. Rescue team member Frank, who's discovered Evan, flies overhead; the gang kills Frank and takes his helicopter. Travers and Qualen fight for control of the gang; Qualen kills Kristel, so that he will be the group's only pilot. Gabe, killing Kynette in a struggle, begins to cross the bridge, but trips a device which blows it up, and just makes it back to the tower. He and Jessie escape before the tower explodes. Jessie goes in search of Frank's copter while Gabe reaches the third suitcase, attaching its homing device to a rabbit to distract Travers. Jessie, meanwhile, is captured by Qualen, while Hal fights another gang member. Qualen finally meets up with Gabe, who destroys the rest of the money by throwing it into the rotating blades. Gabe and Qualen fight in the copter, which crashes down the mountain, entangled in its own cable. Gabe barely escapes, while Qualen is blown up.

On an obviously appreciable level, *Cliffhanger* is a remarkably entertaining movie and a vindication

for director Renny Harlin. Although his *Die Hard 2* was a huge hit, it was also an ungainly film, overstated special effects and stunts sloppily cobbled together. Yet here Harlin displays perfect pitch, not just with the individual scenes of jaw-dropping stunt work, but in the way those episodes flow into each other with varying degrees of intensity. Even Stallone, in the middle of all the leaping, grabbing, slipping and rappeling, gives what is for him a completely unaffected performance, shorn of his usual tics.

So it's also churlish to complain that about one third of the way in, *Cliffhanger* slips from the heights at which it starts and settles on a lower plateau where stunts and peaks dominate actions and personality. If the movie hadn't started so well, it might have spared itself this criticism. The first scene, a little masterpiece of action film-making, is set at the top of a towering crag from which the principals must scurry, via a thin cable and thousands of feet over a rocky floor, to a neighboring precipice; spectacular as they are, the vertiginous settings never overwhelm the characterisations.

The latter may lean a bit on action stereotypes, but the film still manages to churn up the old conflict between easy-going hero Gabe and Michael Rooker's stolid second banana Hal, while feisty love interest (Janine Turner) and loyal comic relief (Ralph Waite) look on anxiously. Any more conflict and the opening scene's drama would have been nearly unbearable. As it is, it's a perfect set-up for the oncoming stakes. Similarly, the second scene, a mid-air skyjacking, is fueled by the sudden reversals that begin when a Treasury agent murders his fellow travellers. Harlin pulls the old action filmmaker's trick of getting you to root for a bad guy pulling off an impossible heist. That's why it's so disappointing that, when the two groups link up, the action also descends from edge-of-the-seat excruciating to merely entertaining. The cast – who seem to be doubling for their stunt people – recede ever more into type, a particularly annoying trend when it comes to Lithgow's Qualen.

To its credit, the film never stops giving you plenty to look at, and few of the possibilities offered by the breathless landscape go unmined. Considerable ingenuity is devoted to the way the caches of cash are destroyed. And Michael France's screenplay is scrupulously fair; it may not have all that many cards to play, but they're all face up on the table. So what if the ending follows the logic of an old serial, in which at some moments tremendous amounts of time are given over to physical feats, while other similarly adventurous tasks are covered with some convenient ending? The title, after all, evokes the predicaments that serial heroes spent seven days of the week trying to escape and from which on Saturday afternoon they slipped effortlessly. Perhaps that old-time innocence is the best thing *Cliffhanger* has to offer.

Henry Sheehan

Cop and a Half

USA 1993

Director: Henry Winkler

Certificate

PG

Distributor

UIP

Production Company

Universal/
Imagine Films

Executive Producer

Tova Laiter

Producer

Paul Maslansky

Associate Producer

Elaine Hall

Production Co-ordinator

Suzanne Lore

Unit Production Manager

Don West

Location Manager

Mary Morgan

Post-production

Supervisor

Robert Hackl

2nd Unit Director

Glen Wilder

Casting

Meg Liberman

Mark Hirschfeld

Florida:

Peggy Kirton Ellis

Assistant Directors

Bruce G. Moriarty

Glen Trotiner

Dean Garvin

2nd Unit:

Barry Waldman

Lisandra Soto

Screenplay

Arne Olsen

Director of Photography

Bill Butler

Colour

Deluxe

2nd Unit Director

of Photography

Frank Flynn

Camera Operators

Walt Fraser

2nd Unit:

Nik Petrick

Frank Miller

Steadicam Operator

Neal Norton

Editors

Daniel Hanley

Roger Tweten

C. Timothy O'Meara

Production Designer

Maria Caso

Art Director

Allen Terry

Set Design

Damon Medlen

Set Decorator

Cindy Coburn

Set Dresser

Jeffrey Scott Taylor

Draughtsperson

Paul Roberts

Scenic Artists

Genessa Goldsmith

Proctor

Susan Inge Wood

Storyboard Artist

Darryl Henley

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Richard Jones

Special Effects

Rick Gearhart

Ken Gorrell

Music

Alan Silvestri

Orchestrations

William Ross

Supervising Music Editor

Kenneth Karman

Music Editor

Andrew Silver

Songs

"Francine", "Free-For-All" by Robert Hackl, performed by The Dadz; "Movin' Much Too Fast" by Curtis Griffin, performed by The Men of Note

Costume Design

Lillian Pan

Wardrobe Supervisors

Lynette Bernay

Kathryn Bird

Make-up Artists

Key:

Marie Del Russo

Brian K. McManus

Jan Canistracci

Isabel Harkins

Title Design

Deborah Ross

Film Design

Titles/Opticals

Pacific Title & Art

Supervising Sound Editor

Paul Clay

Dialogue Editors

Michael Szakmeister

Marty Stein

Carin Rodgers

ADR Editor

Pat Somerset

Sound Recordists

Joe Foglia

Foley:

Karin Roulo

ADR:

Allan Holly

2nd Unit:

Mike Barnitt

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists

Patrick Cycone

John Boyd

Sound Effects Editors

Susan Kurtz

Cameron Frankley

Foley

S. Diane Marshall

Richard LeGrand Jnr

Visual Consultant

Todd Hallowell

Stunts

Billy Gardner III

Tom Bahr

Victoria Ann Bolt

Ray Bryant

Laura Dash

Mike Haynes

Mike Kirton

Mari Miranda

Frank Orsatti

Lisa Jean Renzetti

James Hooks Reynolds

Todd Seeley

Jeff Smolek

Lesa Thurman

Chick Bernhardt

Butch Brickell

Max Daniels

Stephen P. Hart

Christine Iavarone

Anderson (Andy)

Martin

Jeff Moldovan

Al Perez

Buddy Reynolds

Bill Scharpf

Joanna Shelmidine

Gar Stephen

Tommy Mack Turvey

Amy Stephen Wilder

Lance Gilbert

Cast

Burt Reynolds

Nick McKenna

Norman D. Golden II

Devon Butler

Ruby Dee

Rachel

Holland Taylor

Captain Rubio

Ray Sharkey

Fountain

Sammy Hernandez

Raymond

Frank Sivero

Chu

Rocky Giordani

Quintero

Marc Macaulay

Waldo

Tom McCleister

Rudy

Ralph Wilcox

McPhail

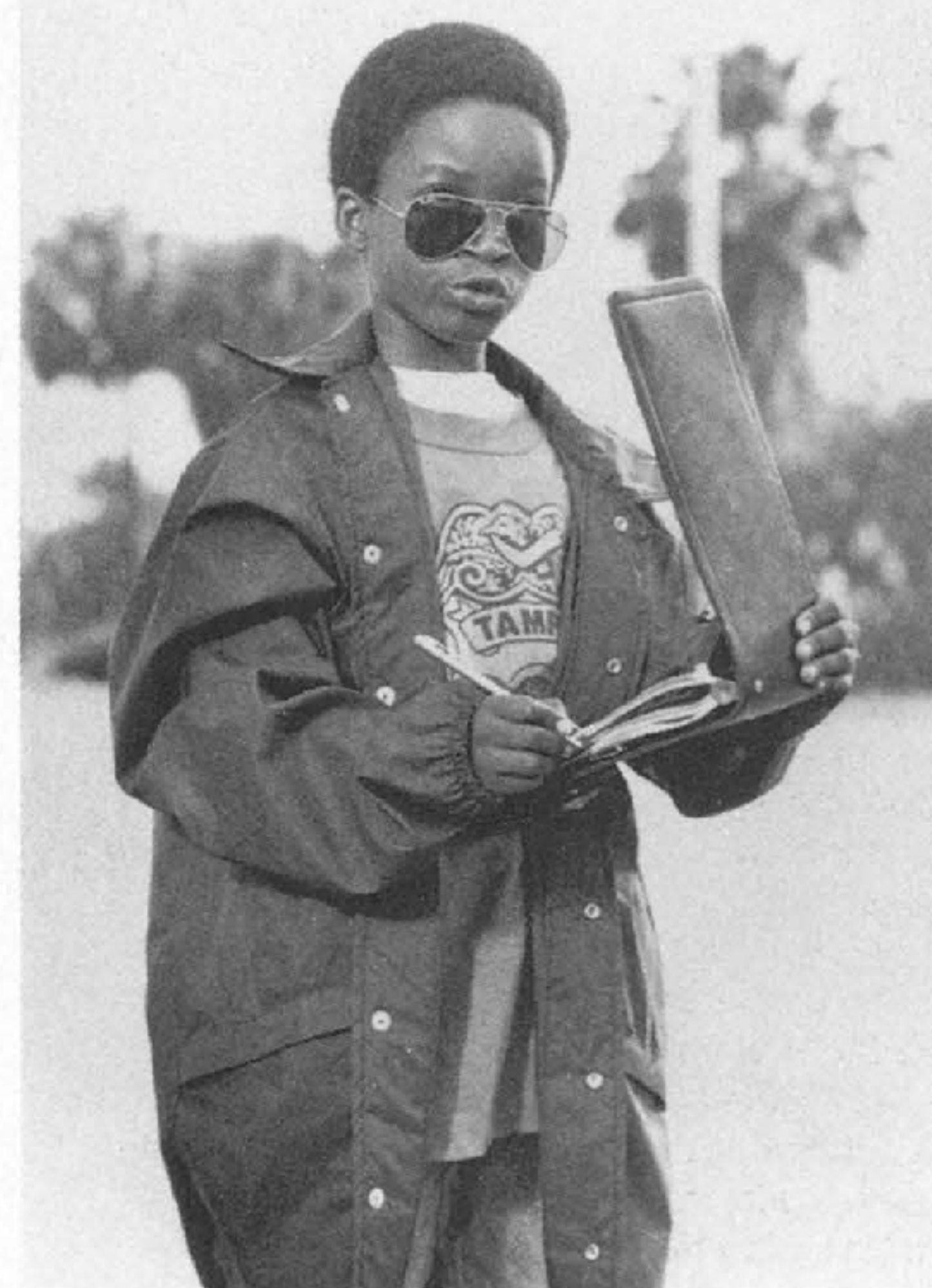
Tom Kouchalakos
Jenkins
Carmine Genovese
Rio
Sean Evan O'Neal
McNally
Max Winkler
Boy in Bathroom
Steve Carlisle
Mr Fleming
Annabelle Weenick
Mr Boyle
Paul Vroom
Purse Thief
Tim Goodwin
Bobo 1 Artist
Mike Benitez
Bobo 2
Maria Canals
Mrs Bobo 2
Nils Stewart
Bobo 3 Thug
Chester Grimes
Bartender
Claudette McAdoo
Homeowner
Becky Kluzek
Martha
Amanda Seales
Katy
Nicholas Caruso
Shane Obedzinski
Boys

Jennifer Howard
Ashley Howard
Jump Rope Twins
Malia Tuailava
Maria
Kenneth Taylor
Passing Cop
Nicole Bradley
Watching Cop
Bill Cordell
Mr Perm
Sandra Itzin Gallo
Police Dispatcher
Amy Stephen Wilder
Lady With Groceries
Alan Landers
Attorney (TV Show)
Judy Clayton
District Attorney
Andrew Reynolds
Skateboard Kid
Debra Becker
TV Reporter

8,735 feet
97 minutes

Tampa, Florida. Eight-year-old Devon Butler dreams of being a cop, trying the tough cop-speak he has picked up from television on friends and foes on his school playground. One day he witnesses tough but disillusioned detective Nick McKenna chasing and arresting a suspect, and notes down the number plate of a car which got away. The next day Devon spots the car again and follows it to a warehouse where he witnesses the killing of a suspected informer by drug dealer and frustrated singer Fountain. When McKenna arrives at the crime scene, he is furious to find that the only witness is a child, and his attitude doesn't improve when Devon demands a badge and handcuffs in return for giving any information.

McKenna reluctantly takes the boy on a shift, which at first is too dull for Devon, who was expecting instant shoot-outs à la *Miami Vice*. But matters improve when he gets to help sort out a domestic dispute and against all odds begins to gain McKenna's respect. However, the shift over, McKenna doesn't invite the kid back. In the meantime, Fountain has instructed his incompetent henchmen to kill the young witness, forcing McKenna to put Devon up in his bachelor pad for protection.



Kindergarten cop: Norman D. Golden II

Fountain's men almost manage to run Devon over when he is on a routine traffic patrol, but McKenna saves him in the nick of time. He invites Devon back on board as his partner and they track down a suspect in a seedy bar; the pair win a fight against the muscular clientele, but lose their man in the ensuing car chase. Devon still feels that McKenna doesn't respect him enough and runs away to face the criminals on his own. He is caught, but McKenna tracks him down to a harbour warehouse. After a chase on land and water, McKenna and Devon immobilise the criminals. They have become a team, yet Devon decides to concentrate on being a normal boy for the foreseeable future.

"I'm your worst nightmare: an eight-year-old with a badge," says Devon to a motorist as he fines him for speeding. He is not wrong. While young kids will no doubt chuckle appreciatively at the broad comedy, adults will look in vain for any sophistication: *Cop and a Half* unashamedly caters to children's crudest fantasies and leaves the rest of the world at a loss. There are a few adult pleasures to be had from McKenna's one-liners ("I'd like to rip your arm off and wave it at you"), but he soon, too soon, succumbs to the charm of his unwanted protégé. This, cynics might feel, may be due more to the overemotional piano music dropped in without subtlety than to any real charisma on the kid's part. Sadly, young first-time actor Norman D. Golden II lacks any of the endearing qualities we have come to expect even from a *Problem Child*.

Screenwriter Arne Olson goes to great length setting up situations, but doesn't often manage to come up with adequate one-liners to turn them into successful comedy, while director Henry Winkler handles the many action sequences well but leaves the clumsily scripted personal drama to its own devices. Burt Reynolds – back after a four-year break from feature films – plays the part which usually goes to Nick Nolte, whose mere physical presence opposite the young girl in *Three Fugitives* was a joke in itself.

But however grumpy and bad-tempered Reynolds' McKenna might be, we know he never really dislikes his young charge Reynolds' character changes as dramatic rules require: his initial treatment of suspects is more likely to attract the attention of Internal Affairs than the admiration of an impressionable youngster; while his sudden transformation from kid-hating monster to potential surrogate dad, while not in the least surprising, never convinces. McKenna's claim that real-life police-work is dullsville compared to *Miami Vice* is of course immediately proved wrong. After all this excitement, Devon's decision to be a normal boy for the time being comes as a surprise for those adults who have bothered to stay the course, and puts kids watching firmly back into their place after an hour and a half of escapism.

Martin Wagner

Equinox

USA 1992

Director: Alan Rudolph

Certificate
15
Distributor
Metro Tartan
Production Company
S.C. Entertainment
International
Executive Producers
Nicolas Stiliadis
Syd Cappe
Sandy Stern
Producer
David Blocker
Associate Producers
Claude Castravelli
William Fay
Michael Scording
Gary Whalen
Production Controller
Gerard Yubero
Production Co-ordinator
Julie Hartley
Los Angeles:
Sandra Tomita
Unit Manager
Bill Campbell
Unit Production Manager
William Fay
Location Manager
Bob Graf
Casting
Pam Dixon
Assistant Directors
Dwight Williams
Frank Davis
Warren Gray
Kimberly Sizemore
Screenplay
Alan Rudolph
Director of Photography
Elliot Davis
Panavision
In Colour
2nd Camera Operators
John Nuler
Jim Zabilla
Steadicam Operator
John Nuler
Video Playback Operator
Harland Snodgrass
Video Production Camera
Tom Adair
Dave Hodgson
Video Production Engineer
Greg Browning
Visual Effects Supervisor
Randall Balsmeyer
Split Screen Opticals
Film Effects
Motion Control Operator
Les Bernstein
Motion Control Effects
Balsmeyer & Everett
Editor
Michael Ruscio
Production Designer
Steven Legler
Art Director
Randy Eriksen
Set Decorator
Cliff Cunningham
Set Dresser
Hather McElhatton
Scenic Artist
Steve Eyrse
Special Effects
Co-ordinator
Paul Murphy
Music Extracts
"Symphonic Dances
for Two Pianos –
Opus 45" by Sergei
Rachmaninov,
performed by Martha
Argerich, Nicholas
Exononmon
Songs
"I'm in the Mood for
Love" by McHugh,
Fields; "Temptation"
by Freed, Brown;
"Fleeting Smile" by and
performed by Roger
Eno; "Istoric Na Edna
Lyubov" by Ivo Papasov,
performed by Ivo
Papasov and His
Orchestra; "Milonga
Del Angel" by and
performed by Astor
Piazzolla; "Left Alone"
performed by Archie
Shepp and Dollar
Brand; "Og Hva Synes
Vi Om Det" by Terje
Rypdal, Bjorn
Kjellemyr, Audun
Kleive, performed by
Terje Rypdal and The
Chasers; "Ambiguity",
"Once Upon a Time",
"Mystery Man" by and
performed by Terje
Rypdal; "Eos", "Mirage"
by Terje Rypdal,
performed by Terje
Rypdal, David Darling;
"Flight" by and
performed by Miroslav
Vitous, Terje Rypdal,
Jack De Johnette;
"Retintin" by Eduardo
Arolas, performed by
The Tango Project;
"Jalousie" by Jacob
Gade, "Caminito" by
Juan de Dios Filiberto,
"Mal De Amores" by
P. Laurenz, "Softly As
In A Morning Sunrise"
by Sigmund Romberg,
"Viborita" by Eduardo
Arolas performed
by William Schimmel,
Michael Sahl,
Stan Kurtis; "Ai Bine"
by and performed
by Ali Farka Toure
Costume Design
Sharen Davis
Costumers
Kelly O'Gurlan
Ann Miller
Key Make-up
Kathryn Bihr
Title Design
Christine Wilson
Titles/Opticals
Cinema Research
Corporation
Supervising Sound Editor
John Nutt
Dialogue Editors
Marjorie L. Hagar
Gwendolyn Yates-
Whittle
Foley Editor
Marjorie L. Hagar
Sound Recordists
Susumu Tokunow
Foley:
Richard Duarte
ADR:
Tami Treadwell
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recordists
Supervisor:
Mark Berger
Leslie Shatz
Foley:
Eric Thompson
ADR:
Tommy Goodwin
Sound Effects
Samuel H. Hinckley
Jennifer L. Ware
James Lebrecht
Foley
Margie O'Malley
Jennifer Myers
Stunt Co-ordinator
Greg Walker
Stunts
Greg Walker
Grady Walker
Helicopter Pilot
Craig Hosking

Cast
Matthew Modine
Henry Petosa/
Freddy Ace
Lara Flynn Boyle
Beverly Franks
Fred Ward
Mr Paris
Tyra Ferrell
Sonya Kirk
Marisa Tomei
Rosie Rivers
Kevin J. O'Connor
Russell Franks
Tate Donovan
Richie Nunn
Lori Singer
Sharon Ace
M. Emmet Walsh
Pete Petosa
Gailard Sartain
Dandridge
Tony Genaro
Eddie Gutierrez
Angel Aviles
Anna Gutierrez
Dirk Blocker
Red
Matthew Modine
Immanuel
Kirsten Ellickson
Young Helena
Pat Clemons
Helena
Debra Dusay
Judith Hamner
Les Podewell
Jerome Hammer
Megan Lee Ochs
Bess
Carlos Sanz
Harold
Lenora Finley
Maye
Isabell Monk
Apartment
Superintendent
Billy Silva
Sabujii
Tom Kasat
I.M. Stong
Dane Wheeler-Nicholson
Self-Defence Victim
Paul Meshejian
Ralph

Robert Gould
Mel
Shirley Venard
Villa Capri Waitress
Willis Burks II
Willie
Pancho Demmings
Morgue Worker
Jack Walsh
Newspaper Man
Martin Marinaro
Attendant
Elizabeth Ann Gray
Large Woman on Bus
Wayne A. Evenson
Large Woman's
Companion
Randy Gust
Bus Punk
Matthew Dudley
John Sargent
Toughs
Diane Wheeler-Nicholson
Drunk Woman
Frank Davis
Marsh
Mark Modine
Cook
Ken Earl
Banker
Vinnie Curto
Gangster
Chris George
Villa Capri Pianist
Kerry Hoyt
Kerry
Rebecca Sabot
Paris' Girlfriend
Suzette Tarzia
Charlene

9,921 feet
110 minutes

Empire City, the future. Helena, a bag lady, dies on the way to hospital, clutching a sealed envelope. In the morgue, Sonya, a young black nurse and aspiring writer, pockets the envelope and begins to research Helena's story. In the same city, Henry Petosa and his friend Russell discuss social plans and Russell's sister Beverly, with whom Henry has been having a romance crippled by mutual shyness. After being mugged for his groceries, Henry arrives home at his apartment and calls Beverly, but puts the phone down without speaking.

Elsewhere in Empire, Freddy Ace – who is Henry's double – argues with his fellow gangster Richie, on their way to the Villa Capri restaurant to meet their higher-up Dandridge. Dandridge coerces the owner Eddie to join their 'family'. Freddy and Richie tussle, with Freddy coming out on top. Henry is visited by his neighbour Rosie, who lives downstairs with her pimp Red; she contrives to leave Henry with her baby while she goes out to 'work'. Freddy arrives home to tell his wife that he has been made the personal driver of his boss Mr Paris.

The next day, Henry's adoptive father Pete tells him that the bank has made him an offer for the garage he owns and they both work in. Meanwhile, Mr Paris hints that he wouldn't be displeased to see the back of Richie. Henry is 'paid back' for his babysitting with a sexual favour from Rosie. ►

◀ Red arrives and, furious, hits Rosie; Henry scuffles with Red, who falls downstairs.

Sonya discovers that a blind trust account had been set up in Helena's name. Posing as a biographer, she visits a firm of attorneys and learns that Immanuel, a European count, deposited the money 30 years earlier. He had an affair with Helena, then a ballet dancer; she fell pregnant and gave birth to twin boys (Henry and Freddy) who were separately adopted and are unaware of each other's existence. Immanuel, already married, returned to Europe, where he died in a racing car accident; Helena had a breakdown. The attorneys also discover that the account includes a retainer for the firm, and they agree that in the event of a withdrawal they will split with Sonya 10% of a sum which is now \$4m.

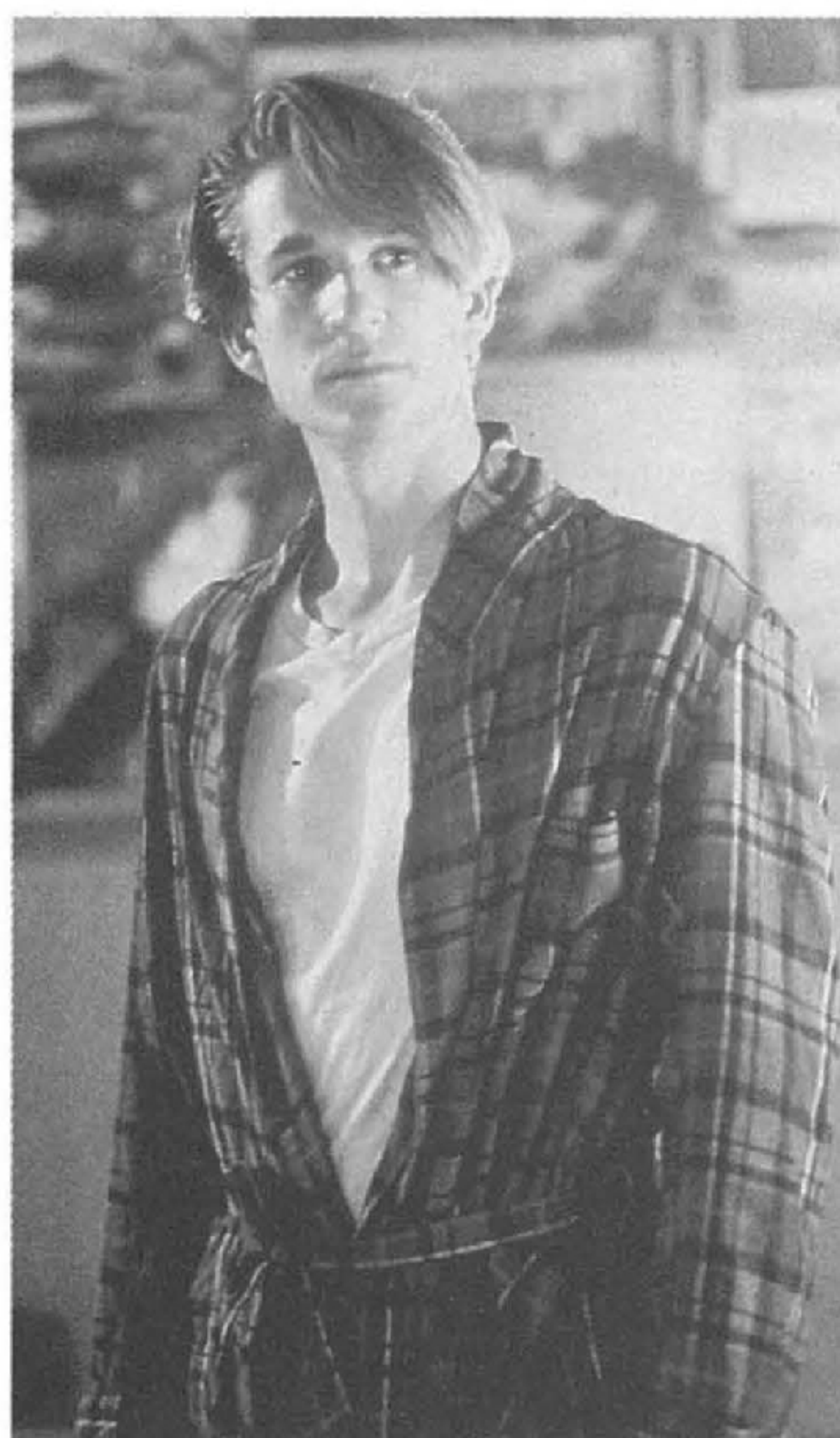
Over dinner at the Villa Capri, Henry tells Russell and Beverly of the potential sale of the garage, and his plans to travel abroad. Richie arrives to intimidate Eddie, and Russell, who is besotted with Anna, ascertains that there is something wrong. Richie spots Henry and, mistaking him for Freddy, taunts him before being dragged away. Later, Freddy shoots Richie dead. He is received by Paris and Dandridge for a celebratory drink, but is sullen, and only grudgingly accepts a cash reward. Henry returns home to find that an enraged Red has killed Rosie.

Sonya finds Henry's adoption papers, and when she confronts Pete, he gives a veiled affirmation. Henry dines with Beverly and they once more discuss leaving. She is not entirely persuaded, but says she would like to visit the Grand Canyon. Later, Russell badgers Henry to help him sort out Anna and Eddie's troubles with the gangsters. Henry gives Beverly a necklace and they arrange to meet later that night to leave.

Henry meets Russell at the Villa Capri, where Freddy and Dandridge soon arrive. While Freddy talks to Eddie, Anna slaps Dandridge, who knocks her over; Russell attempts to come to her rescue. Dandridge sees Henry and is startled by his resemblance to Freddy; Anna shoots Dandridge, then threatens Freddy with the gun. Stunned by the sight of Henry, Freddy is shot by Anna. Henry finds Freddy slumped in an alleyway; they stare at each other, before Henry rushes off.

Stopping at the garage to take money and a car, he calls for Beverly. She won't come down and begs him to come in, but he drives away. Four days later, Beverly and Sonya discuss the events of the fateful night; Freddy has died and Henry has disappeared. En route for the Grand Canyon, Henry sees two young twin boys in a diner and realisation dawns on him. He stands and looks out over the Grand Canyon, alone.

● *Equinox* could be *Made In Heaven* – which Alan Rudolph saw taken away from him and disastrously rejigged by a studio – remade, with



Half a man: Matthew Modine

derailed genetics instead of destinal romance as its keynote. This is one of Rudolph's 'own' projects, as opposed to those he serves up to preserve his niche in the Hollywood hierarchy. At this point in his career – especially given the storyline of *Equinox* – it would have been very easy for Rudolph to do a *Cape Fear* and simplify his style into self-denigrating Lynchian strangeness.

But the Rudolph fan club need not fret. *Equinox* is like espresso for the eyes, it's Rudolph *in excelsis*. Even bridging scenes are limned with oneiric detail, look-twice touches. The streets of his low-key sci-fi metropolis (actually Minneapolis) are dotted with clusters of strange hooded figures, and omnipresent posters for the chance game Lotto. Rudolph films his flashback tale like a laid-back pupil of Roeg, all elegantly faint echoes and wisps of worrying detail. *Equinox* has enough inventiveness in its audacious little Moebius script to furnish four normal Hollywood projects.

Rudolph takes his literally conventional storyline (think *Twins* remade by Jacques Rivette – everything hinges on deferral rather than immediate resolution) and glosses it with a persistent stutter of visual symbolism. Leitmotifs of darkness and light, convergence and duality, might have been predicted from the titular off, but *Equinox* wears Rudolph's intelligence lightly. He includes in all the things Hollywood seems compelled to ignore these days – things like racial diversity, social failure, real ardour, unreal awe. He may seem far removed from the description 'political film maker', but 'politics' – as an overview of how different people(s) overlap – is there in his films: America is pictured as a polyphonic, multi-racial patchwork.

This white boys' story is traced and written by a young black woman, and this fact alone seems to make the film (and its tall but potentially thin tale) resonate outward from the centre, in a slowly accumulating but sharply registered dissonance. Even the music reinforces this fundamental, quavering

split: hung between the icy jazz of Terje Rypdal, and the shimmering black-jewel sound of Malian bluesman Ali Farka Toure (heard every time Tyra Ferrell comes on screen). Ferrell might be the oddest on-screen alter ego Rudolph has yet given himself. At the beginning, she tells a colleague, "I'm writing a story. It's a fairy tale, kinda." Rudolph has described his films as urban fairy tales, and this one flirts with disastrous overload – what with the glaring symbolism, the Mills & Boon flashbacks, and the constant switches between daft humour and grim dystopian reality.

It's easy to forget just how hard-edged Rudolph's multi-nuanced plotlines can be, and how bruised, misbegotten and derelict the lives of his characters. Modine – like Tom Berenger in *Love at Large* and Kris Kristofferson in *Trouble in Mind* – plays his tough guy philosopher as a subtle pastiche, but never takes it too far into empty irony: his Freddy Ace seems a real (hurting, rather than hurtful) presence. Each twin could have had a film to himself, and the scenes Modine's bumbling Henry has with both Lara Flynn Boyle (cast – in a long, simmering, sexless relationship – as something like Louise Brooks' Lulu turned into a safe-sex era spinster) and M. Emmet Walsh (as his putative daddy) are a joy.

From the opening credits (a simple, subtle change from light to dark), Rudolph contrives varying degrees of eloquent luminosity. The boys, it transpires, were born on September 23 – one of the two days in the year when an equinox can take place. "Equinox" is the code word which opens the secret bank account, but it's also the idea upon which hang the film's overlapping moods. Typically, Rudolph lets a peripheral character spell things, late in the proceedings. "That's when light and dark are equal," wheezes the corpulent Dandridge, thinking about himself but in reality talking about the tragic equinoctial night ahead.

By the end of the film it's safe to assume that Rudolph is mapping not just a personality split, but a national one. US cinema was founded on genres (the Western, *noir*) which betray a restless, querulous worry about questions of origin, identity, birthright. What starts out as a banal Romantic confusion (only Rudolph could get away with this stuff about dashing European counts and tragic ballerinas) ends in a climactic scene which you will find either unutterably resonant, or a pseudo-cosmic cop-out.

As Henry stands perched on the edge of realisation (an empty realisation, for this is a life emptied four times over in one go: his lineage, his brother, his lover, his own identity), Rudolph's camera describes a breathtaking open-air pirouette, away from Henry and around the arid American beyond. The Grand Canyon stands for the birth(s) of the past, and the desolation of the present; it is, in other words, a dried up Empire.

lan Penman

Fire in the Sky

USA 1993

Director: Robert Lieberman

Certificate 15	Production Designer Laurence Bennett
Distributor UIP	Art Director Mark W. Mansbridge
Production Company Paramount	Set Design John Leimanis
Executive Producer Wolfgang Glattes	Set Decorator Daniel L. May
Producers Joe Wizan Todd Black	Special Effects Co-ordinator Alan Edward Lorimer
Co-producers Tracy Tormé Robert Strauss Nilo Rodis-Jamero	Special Effects Paul Stewart Mark R. Lillenthal Lambert Powell
Production Co-ordinator Linda Warren	Puppeteers E. Erik Jensen Mark S. Siegel
Unit Production Manager Wolfgang Glattes	Robert A. Cooper Leonard Levitt
Location Manager Joanna Guzzetta	Wendy Lou Morton Lisa Aimee Sturz
Casting Rick Pagano Sharon Bialy Debi Manwiller	Music Mark Isham
Local: Sunny Seibel	Music Director Ken Kugler
Voice: Barbara Harris	Orchestrations Ken Kugler
Assistant Directors J. Michael Haynie Martin Jedlicka Rock Barlett Lane	Additional: Ardell Hake Kim Scharnberg
Screenplay Tracy Tormé Based on the book <i>The Walton Experience</i> by Travis Walton	Music Editor Tom Carlson
Director of Photography Bill Pope	Songs "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights" by Huey P. Meaux, performed by Freddy Fender; "Blinded by Love" by Allen Toussaint, performed by Johnny Winter; "Black Water" by Patrick Simmons, performed by the Doobie Brothers; "A Message of Murder" by Franz Waxman; "Guest of Honor" by Lane Caudell, Roger Brown, performed by Danae Mitchell; "Sons and Daughters (Reprise)" by Art Neville, Malcolm Burn, Lorraine Neville, Arthel Neville, Ian Neville, performed by the Neville Brothers
Colour DeLuxe	Costume Design Joe I. Tompkins
Camera Operators Martin Schaer Christopher Haarhoff	Costume Supervisor Margo Baxley
Video Playback Tom Schurke	Make-up Artists Ken Chase Charlene Roberson
Visual Effects Co-ordinator Molly Naughton	Additional: Dennis Glass
Alien Sequence Designer Michael Owens	Title Design Nina Saxon
Visual Effects Supervisor Michael Owens	Film Design
Alien Sequence/Special Visual Effects Industrial Light & Magic	Titles/Opticals Cinema Research Corporation
Producer: Clint Goldman	Supervising Sound Editor Joseph A. Ippolito
Executive in Charge of Production: Patricia Blau	Supervising ADR Editor Juno J. Ellis
Camera Operator: Kim Marks	ADR Editor Becky Sullivan
Art Director: Harley Jessup	Supervising Foley Editor Pamela Bentkowski
Set Decoration Supervisor: Barbara Affonso	Foley Editor Christine Danelski
Chief Set Decoration: Brian Gernand	Sound Recordists Henry Garfield
John Goodson	ADR: Bob Baron
Key Special Effects: Dave Heron	Foley: Greg Curda
Special Effects	Music: Stephen Krause
Foremen: Geoff Heron	Dolby stereo
Dan Nelson	Consultant: Douglas Greenfield
Visual Effects Editor: Tim Eaton	
Visual Effects	
Art Director: Mark Moore	
Computer Graphics	
Supervisor: Sandra Ford Karpman	
Puppeteering/	
Creature Supervisor: Jeff Mann	
Puppeteers/	
Creature Technicians: Jean Bolte	
Bryan Dewe	
Chris Goeh	
Editor Steve Mirkovich	

Sound Re-recordists
Donald O. Mitchell
Frank A. Montano
Michael Herbick
Sound Effects Editors
John Leveque
Frank Howard
Bruce Stambler
Richard Yawn
Foley Artists
David Lee Fein
Ken Dufva
Stunt Co-ordinator
Chuck Waters
Stunts
Webster Whinery
Jim Waters

Cast
D.B. Sweeney
Travis Walton
Robert Patrick
Mike Rogers
Craig Sheffer
Allan Dallis
Peter Berg
David Whitlock
Henry Thomas
Greg Hayes
Bradley Gregg
Bobby Cogdill
Noble Willingham
Blake Davis
Kathleen Wilhoite
Katie Rogers
James Garner
Frank Watters
Georgia Emelin
Dana Rogers
Scott Macdonald
Dan Walton
Wayne Grace
Cyrus Gilson
Kenneth White
Buck
Robert Covarrubias
Ray Melendez
Bruce Wright
Dennis Clay
Robert Biheller
Ellis
Tom McGranahan Snr
Dr Wilson
Julie Ariola
Dr Cayle

Peter Mark Vasquez
Ramon
Gordon Scott
George
Mical Shannon Lewis
Mary Rogers
Courtney Esler
Emily Rogers
Holly Hoffman
Cathy
Marcia MacLaine
Nurse
Glen Lee
Geiger Counter Man
Vernon Barkhurst
Bill Grant
Jerry Basham
Teresa Fox
Travis Walton
Citizens
Susan Castillo
Anchorwoman
Jane Ferguson
Lurae Jenkins
Nancy Neifert
Cathy's Mom
Charley Lang
Jarvis Powell
Lynn Marie Sager
Ida
Mari Padron
Thelma
John Breedlove
Balding Man
Frank Chavez
Orlando
Louis A. Lotorto Jr
Paramedic
Ronald Lee Marriott
Digger
Shinichi Mine
Japanese Reporter
Scott M. Seekins
Emergency Room
Doctor
Eric Wilsey
Claude

9,852 feet
109 minutes

November 5, 1975. Special investigator Frank Watters is called to Snowflake, Arizona to interview a five-man logging team who claim to have survived an uncanny and terrifying experience. A sixth member of the team is missing and their leader Mike Rogers describes how his best friend Travis Walton disappeared. After a hard day's lumbering, the crew are travelling home in a pick-up truck when they notice a strange red light in the sky and see a large, saucer-shaped object hovering above the ground. Before Rogers can stop him, Travis approaches the object, whereupon a beam of white light lifts him, then dashes him to the ground. Convinced that Travis is dead, the others persuade Rogers to drive on, but he decides go back for his buddy. Rogers returns alone to the scene, but there is no trace of Travis or the object.

Unimpressed by this story, and suspecting foul play, Watters orders a



Space cowboys: Patrick, Garner

search of the woods. No body is found but the townsfolk are convinced that the loggers murdered the popular Travis, while even Rogers' kid sister Dana (Travis's girlfriend) and his wife Katie are sceptical. With the arrival of UFO fanatics and autograph hunters, media harassment, local hostility and Watters' pressure tactics begin to rattle the team. They take polygraph tests, but Rogers refuses to undergo a second one when the results prove inconclusive. Five days after the incident, Rogers receives a phone call from Travis, who is found huddled naked in the corner of a gas station office. As he recovers the ability to communicate, he experiences memory flashes of his extra-terrestrial experience. In the longest of these nightmare flashbacks, Travis is entombed in the bowels of a honeycombed atrium. When he tries to escape, tadpole-headed creatures drag him to an operating table and attempt to drill his temples.

Travis eventually recovers and Watters moves on, swearing that he will one day crack the case. Some years later, Travis, having married Dana, fathered two children and set up a long-cherished motorcycle business, goes looking for Rogers, who has lost his house and is estranged from his own family. Returning to the site of the incident, they are reconciled.

Scenes of backwoodsmen squaring off while brandishing chainsaws or erect digits turn this flimsy true story of UFO sighting into something resembling an outdoor prison movie. Although a conspiracy is initially hinted at when the loggers agree to stick to the same story, any suspicion that they might not be sincere is banished when their close encounter is reverently depicted in flashback. While this 'it's-all-true' approach validates the startling nightmare sequence at the film's climax, the very power of that sequence exposes the 'Waltons-on-steroids' treatment of the earthbound scenes.

This hesitancy of mood is exacerbated by an ambivalence about the Mike Rogers character. In simultaneously celebrating and punishing the sullen macho values behind his role as an honest but tight-lipped pillar of the community, the script exposes the full range of actor Robert Patrick's baleful glances. In contrast, D.B. Sweeney as Travis is allowed to play up his function as the film's literal dreamer and all-round most popular person without question.

Appropriately enough, 'real' issues - hard work, nosy neighbours, devious policemen and rural poverty - fill out the background. Yet judging by their behaviour, Rogers and his crew are permanently scarred more by living in a town called Snowflake than by working for a living or seeing their workmate zapped by a flying saucer. It's as if being accused of having an overactive imagination leaves them open to the charge of being soft, flaky and capable of melting.

Nick James

I Was on Mars

Germany/USA 1991

Director: Dani Levy

Certificate
15
Distributor
Metro Tartan
Production Company
Luna-Film
GmbH (Berlin)
In co-production with
Fama Film AG (Bern)/
Good Machine
(New York)/Balthazar
Pictures (New York)/
Fool Film (Berlin)/
Prokino Film (Stephan
Hutter) (Munich)/
WDR Westdeutscher
Rundfunk (Cologne)/
Teleclub AG (Zurich)/
Atlas Filmkunst
(Hanns Eckelkamp)
With financial
assistance from the
Berlin Film Board
(FKF)/the Federal
German Film Board
(FFA, Berlin)/the
Federal Department
of the Interior (EDI,
Switzerland)/Kanton
and City of Basel
Executive Producers
Gudrun Ruzickov-
Steiner
Rolf Schmid
Janet Jacobson
Line Producers
Ted Hope
James Schamus
Pre-production
Co-ordinator
Arndt Wiegering
Production Co-ordinators
Maura McGloin
Christina Larsson
Production Manager
Kathryn Colbert
Location Managers
John Rath
David Buckingham
Casting
Wendy Ettinger
R.J. Cutler
Assistant Directors
Tomi Streiff
Linda Wilson
Nina Foriep
Screenplay
Dani Levy
Maria Schrader
Director of Photography
Carl-F. Koschnick
In colour
Editor
Susann Lahaye
Production Designer
Dan Ouellette
Art Director
Monica Bretherton
Special Effects
Drew Jirano
Music
Niki Reiser
Music Extracts
"Le Mystère des Voix
Bulgares"
Music Performed by
Violin:
Ulli Bartel
Percussion:
Willi Cotoun
Clarinet:
Michael Heitzler
Saxophones/Drums/
Percussion:
David Klein
Violin:
Vladimir Maliakin
Voice:
Iwanka Pietrek
Accordion:
Ingeborg Poffet
Programming Soprano:
Niki Reiser
Bass/Piano:
Olivier Truan

Songs
"Mixing Bodies",
"No Time For Play"
by K. Haig, H. Walker,
T. Silbert, G. Erikson,
R. Pilotte, performed
by Kev Ses and Harry B;
"Beating the Count" by
David Klein, performed
by David Klein, Olivier
Truan; "Cheap Trick"
by Jim Voss, Nina
C. Alice,
Jogi Rautenberg,
performed by
Skew Siskin
Costume Design
Arndt Wiegering
Wardrobe Supervisor
Janie Bryant
Make-up
Sabine Roller
Titles
Studio Bartoschek
Sound Editor
Kerstin Kexel
Sound Recordists
Chris Logan
Music:
Thomas Strebel
Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recordist
Holger Rogge
Film Extracts
Oreos With Attitude
(1991)
*Henry: Portrait of a Serial
Killer* (1989)
The Refrigerator (1991)

Cast
Maria Schrader
Silva
Dani Levy
Alio
Mario Giacalone
Nic
Antonia Rey
La Mama
Penny Arcade aka
Susana Ventura
Coffee Shop Waitress
Luis Caballero
Nasty Cabbie at
the Airport
Rafael Clements
Cab Driver
Stuart Duckworth
Bar manager "Smile"
Pasquale Gaeta
Hotel Owner
Lisa Langford
Second Hand Store
Clerk
Ben Berman
Mr Pawlo
Ronnie Shades
Man with open zipper
Arndt Wiegering
Billy
Cyndi Coyne
Girl with lost cat
Bob Albert
Grocery Clerk
Julianne Donovan
Aljo's Party Flirt
David Van Tieghem
Percussionist
Brian Asche
Condom Boy
Linda Wilson
Gallery Owner
Chan Wai Yee
Chinese Business Man
Jim Black
Singing Man
Corey Kotler
Hassidic Jew
John Le Conte
Marcello
Tim "Andre" Davis
Disco Cabbie
David Usner
Fancy Restaurant
Owner
Mila Radulovic
Blonde Beauty

John Rath
Bartender
Salvatore Camarda
Barber
Jeff Berman
Police Officer
Edie Falco
Female Cab Driver
Gary McDaniels
Reney Diamond
Anette Eng
Irene Georgerian
Diane Perneti
Kim Reinle
Debra Robinson
Tracy Heath Strain
Kim Wells
Robert Grath
Al Attara
Vince Burger
Glenn Coullins
Eileen V. Clarke

Arnold E. Collins
William J. Hewitt
Richard W. Sears
Chava Tiger
Jack Tiger
Rosalie Traina
Susan Brodsky
Bartholome Charles
Bernard Holloway
Michael Plaut
Richard Callaghan
Irving Morton
Ted Hope
R.J. Cutler
Thomas George
Helen Anzalone
Janie Bryant
Carlos Depaula
Rodney Paloscio
Christopher Smith
Jill Tracy
Philip Alpersen
Judy Swaby

7,866 feet
87 minutes

Silva, a diffident young Polish woman, arrives in New York, lured by the glamour and luxury of the West. After bumbling her way through customs, she takes a cab into town, but panics at the cost of the ride. Ignoring the driver's advice, she gets out of the car in a "bad area", and makes her way to a hostel. With hardly any money, and even less English, she moves into cheap lodgings and takes a job in a restaurant, where she is sexually harassed by the customers and criticized by her boss for not smiling enough. One morning, in a diner, she is approached by a tiny, dapper stranger who seems to want to make friends with her; but he steals all her savings without her even realizing it. Silva is forced to pawn her few belongings and to live on the streets, scavenging food. Determined to retrieve her money from the conman, who she learns is called Alio, she hangs around the diner, waiting for him to appear. Eventually, she thinks she recognises him and corners him, only to discover it isn't Alio but his best friend Nic. Nic leads Silva to Alio and demands he give her back the money. Alio refuses.

Undeterred, Silva follows Alio wherever he goes, demanding that he return her savings. She even shares his taxi, managing to sneak inside the house where he lives with Nic. After a drunken party, the two men find Silva sitting at the breakfast table; they try ignoring her but she won't go away. Exasperated by her dishevelled appearance, Alio demands she tidy herself up, and she ends up looking like a "real American woman." The three go for an outing on Coney Island. Swimming in the sea, Silva is spotted by a voyeuristic old man, who invites the trio into his apartment, tells them his life story, and lends them his car, which the three end up sleeping in.

With Nic away at work, Silva makes love to Alio, then accompanies him downtown to visit the gallery that Nic manages; however, it turns out that he is really the cleaner. Despite his loss of face, Nic takes Silva on a romantic date, after which he too makes love with her. Urged on by his mother, Nic wants to marry Silva. Alio wants to continue his affair with her. She surprises them both by saying she wants to go home to Poland. They reluctantly drive her ▶

◀ to the airport, begging her not to leave. She borrows money from them both, to buy toys and presents. As she leaves, she hands them a photo showing her with her husband and children in Poland.

● *I Was On Mars* portrays a New York far removed from the bohemian enclaves of Woody Allen's Upper Manhattan, or from Spike Lee's boiling hot Bed-Stuy of *Do The Right Thing*. Dani Levy's film has more in common with the vision of underground and avant-garde film-makers like Jonas Mekas and Shirley Clarke, who have been similarly baffled and astounded by the metropolis. It is a threatening place, in its own way as remote to outsiders as Mars – hence the ironic title. Marianne Moore once wrote of New York, "to go in is to be lost." Levy's movie bears out her adage. Its young Polish protagonist arrives in America with some vague desire to see the luxury of the West at first hand, but finds a city every bit as frayed at the edges as the Eastern Europe that Westerners are accustomed to imagining. As she flies over the skyscrapers and round the Statue of Liberty on a guided helicopter tour, she seems awestruck by the scale and beauty of the architecture. On ground level, though, it's a different story: one of Levy's stated aims was to satirize the so-called Triumph of the West, and there is no better way to do it than by showing the Big Apple rotting at the core.

The picture was shot quickly on a miniscule budget, while the film-makers awaited funding for a more ambitious project. This undoubtedly works to its advantage. The film has a roughness, a fragmented quality, which complements the characters, all of whom seem to be in a permanent state of confusion. There's Silva, the innocent abroad, who has come to New York for no very discernible reason. Then there are the two men, Alio and Nic, who have radically opposed, but equally inept strategies for pursuing the American Dream. Alio is the spiv, the lazy, aspiring Goodfella who wants to lie

and cheat his way to the top of the ladder. Nic, by contrast, works hard, pays his taxes, and deludes himself he'll one day make the grade as a middle manager. Coming between them, Silva uses passivity as another strategy for survival; she manages to be forceful through inertia, to evoke extreme reactions in those round her through her simple presence.

Levy's directorial style is elliptical and downbeat, full of close-ups of hands and faces and little montage sequences. He and scriptwriter Maria Schrader (they also both star) come up with some memorable images: the shot of Silva, meek and dowdy, walking through the rush-hour traffic is reminiscent of the scene in Hal Ashby's *Being There*, where Chance the gardener ventures up the middle of the freeway, suitcase in hand. Like Chance, Silva is tiny and fragile by comparison with the harsh landscape she occupies. At the start of the film, she makes an almost anonymous entrance, emerging from behind the shadow of the brash, all-American woman we first presume to be the heroine.

For all its mordant satire about the changing nature of East-West relations, *I Was On Mars* sometimes seems derivative. For instance, it bears more than a passing resemblance to *Stranger Than Paradise* (its airport ending, in particular, might have been taken wholesale from Jarmusch's movie.) The film starts off in an acerbic key, but gradually becomes more maudlin. Still, there's no denying Levy's eye for comic detail, and the film abounds in resonant little scenes: Alio scraping garlic onto his American food; Silva finding the elixir of New York streetlife in a pair of shades and headphones; Nic's humiliation when the other two discover he is only a cleaner in the gallery which he claims to manage. Levy, Schrader and Mario Gialalone all give wry, self-conscious performances, eccentric without lapsing into caricature. If this is just a taster, Levy's forthcoming *Meschugge* should be well worth seeing.

Geoffrey Macnab

Die Jungfrauenmaschine (Virgin Machine)

Germany 1988

Director: Monika Treut

Certificate

Not yet issued

Distributor

Out On a Limb

Production Company

Hyäne Film I/II

GbR/NDR

With assistance from
Hamburger Filmbüro

Producer

Monika Treut

Co-producer

Eberhard Scharfenberg

Assistant Directors

Thomas Tielsch

Greta Schiller

Screenplay

Monika Treut

Director of Photography

Elfi Mikesch

Black and white

Editor

Renate Merck

Songs

"120 Tage", "That Night

At The Ritz" performed

by Mona Mur; "Die

Liebe" performed by

Laibach; "Get Down",

"Paradise Drive"

performed by Blazing

Redheads; "Don't Fool

Me", "Voodoo Voodoo"

performed by

Pearl Harbour

Sound Editor

Alfred Olbrisch

Sound Recordist

Richard Borowski

Cast

Ina Blum

Dorothee Müller

Marcelo Uriona

Bruno

Gad Klein

Heinz

Peter Kern

Hormone Specialist

Hans-Christoph

Blumenberg

Telephone Caller

Dominique Gaspar

Dominique

Susie (Sexpert) Bright

Susie Sexpert

Shelly Mars

Ramona

Fritz Mikesch

Wolfgang Raach

George Lannan

Mona Mur

Erica Marcus

Rhonda Jarvis

Carla Wood Saivre

Fakir Musafar

Marvin Moss

Rosanne Johnson

Fanny Fatal

Nan Kinney

Sky Benfro

Shadow Morton

Steve Mobla

Flora Gaspar

Pearl Harbour

7,650 feet

85 minutes

Subtitles

heard about her research and is volunteering to take part in it.

Dorothee goes to San Francisco in search of her mother, but finds she has disappeared from her last address owing five weeks' rent. She moves into a room in the Tenderloin, where she sees her neighbours engaged in various sex rituals. On TV, the seductive-voiced Ramona offers therapy for those "addicted to romantic love". Enthralled, Dorothee calls her immediately to make an appointment.

On a beach, Dorothee muses she is in love. A much-travelled Hungarian woman, Dominique, introduces herself and befriends her. Dorothee next encounters Susie Sexpert, an American woman handing out leaflets for a women-only strip show, which she encourages Dorothee to come to. The two join a group riding out of town by motorbike and Susie shows Dorothee her collection of dildos. The main act at the strip show is Ramona, who appears as a man in suit and moustache. Dorothee introduces herself to Ramona after the show, and they arrange to meet the next day. Ramona whisks Dorothee away in a limousine; the two have their photo taken for a customised "I love you" poster, go to a gig and have great sex. Next morning, Ramona presents Dorothee with a bill for \$500; she leaves and Dorothee bursts out laughing. Back at the club, Dorothee strips onstage. About to return to Germany, she throws her photographs of her visit into the harbour and ponders her romantic future.

● "I like to keep my sex toys clean," explains the irrepressibly matter-of-fact 'sexpert' Susie Bright as she inches a condom over one of the diverse collection of dildos in her attaché case. Her remark serves as a neat statement of intent for the first of Monika Treut's solo features (following *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*, co-directed with cinematographer Elfi Mikesch). *Virgin Machine* visits the queerer shores of female sexuality with a candid charm that would (almost) convert the Pope to contraception. In fact, it could be the first piece of queer cinema to give the pontiff screen time: Ramona's TV commercial for her 'therapy' for love addicts (a deliciously literal example of advertising as seduction) comes cheekily sandwiched between footage of a papal motorcade and a desperate ad for discount car coats.

That television should repeatedly function as a disruptive stimulus to Dorothee's picaresque journey of sexual self-discovery – its images providing a provocative juxtaposition with unsatisfactory reality, rather than lulling its viewer into submission – is typical of Treut's comic inventiveness in inverting politically correct received wisdom. It is TV that alerts Dorothee to the possibility of erotica for women and (by implication) to a woman-centred erotic autonomy – a promise of pleasure tellingly contrasted with the lumpen company of boyfriend Heinz.

Virgin Machine's larger implication is that female sexual pleasure is any-

● Dorothee Müller, a young German woman researching the mysteries of romantic love, muses on her addiction to love. She tells us about her mother, who now lives in the US, about her boredom with her boyfriend Heinz, and about her half-brother Bruno, who is also her lover. Heinz tries to maul Dorothee as she writes about the sexual habits of the female chimpanzee. He asks who slept in her bed and Dorothee replies it was her half-brother. Dorothee visits a hormone expert and questions him about amphetamine, which the body produces when in love. At home, Dorothee pores over photographs of fetuses and penises while a woman on TV talks heatedly about being an "empty vessel" in procreation.

Bored by Heinz on another visit, Dorothee is absorbed by another woman on TV talking about the need for porn for women. Heinz suggests she could make more money that way than through her research; Dorothee cuts the protesting Heinz's hair. Alone, Dorothee has a vision of DNA and sperm and imagines a reunion with Bruno. A man phones her; he has



Spivving dangerously: Dani Levy, Maria Schrader, Mario Gialalone



Candid camera: Ina Blum, Shelly Mars

thing but 'natural', a claim which the apparent appeals to biology in the earlier part of the film – from the accounts of the sexual habits of chimps to Dorothee's fascination with hormones and DNA – only serves to ironically confirm. The result is one of the most anarchic, cynical and subversively funny cinematic forays into sexual politics in recent memory. Penis-to-vagina sex is "old-fashioned": "Nowadays there are so many ways to make love," Susie tells the wide-eyed Dorothee. Then there are Susie's enthusiastic crypto-documentary demystifications of the sex industry. "It's not a pretty face that lasts the longest – big tits will last for ever," she explains, citing the case of Candy Sample, a veteran performer who looks forward to having her 50FF breasts reduced as soon as she retires.

Mikesch's lush black-and-white cinematography – part dark Expressionist glamour and part post-Godard post-punk home movie – and Ina Blum's carmined, kohl-eyed silent-movie looks as Dorothee are perfectly suited to this blurring of straight-to-camera sexual politics and cheerfully contentious sexual pleasures.

But when Dorothee concludes from Susie's consciousness-raising that "Feminists should go [to strip clubs] instead of being uptight – it's the perfect place to live out their fantasies," Treut's provocatively Paglian words come from a world where men have already been demoted from oppressors to unintentional comedians and irritants. The dullness of the unfortunate Heinz is mercilessly underlined by the sound of a fly buzzing as he speaks. Dominique's intrusive male boss has to be turned away from the women-only strip club by a gentle but firm butch doorwoman. The stranger who approaches Dorothee under the guise of aiding her amorous research seems to regard his background as the son of an SS officer as a personal selling point. Part of the way through his phone call it becomes evident that he still lives with his mother – but by then Dorothee has long since wandered off, metaphorically as well as literally, to wash her hair.

Claire Monk

The King's Whore

France/Italy/UK 1990

Director: Axel Corti

Certificate
15

Distributor
Arrow Films
Production Companies
AFC/FR3 Films
Productions/Cinema
à Cinema/Cinecitta/
Umbrella Films
In association with
Solfinergie
Images Investissements
Investimage
SLAV
Cofimage

Producers
Maurice Bernart
Wieland Schulz-Keil
Paolo Zaccaria
Production Supervisor
Roberto Cocco
Production Co-ordinator
Lisa Dasteel
Production Managers
Mino Barbera
Gérald Molto
Unit Managers
Bruno Ricci
Eric Jolly
Natalie Bernart
Jean-Yves Asselin
Mario Francini
Location Manager
Enrico Pini

Assistant Directors
Tony Brandt
Alain Centonze
Michel Ferry
Mauro Sacripanti
Luc Etienne
Screenplay
Daniel Vigne
Frederic Raphael
Axel Corti
Based on the novel
Jeanne de Luynes,
comtesse de Verue
by Jacques Tournier
Additional Dialogue
Derek Marlowe
English adaptation:
Tim Grimes

Director of Photography
Gernot Roll
In colour

Editor
Joelle Van Effenterre
Production Designer
Francesco Frigeri
Michèle Abbe-Vannier

Art Directors
Atos Mastrogiralamo
François Marcepoil

Set Decorators
Lorenzo D'Ambrosio
Jacques Leguillon

Draughtsmen
Susanna Giovannini
Pierfranco Luscri

Special Effects
Celeste Battistelli

Paintings
Felix Semyonov

Music

Gabriel Yared
Music Extracts
"Miserere" by Gregorio
Allegri, performed
by The Tallis Scholars,
Alison Stamp; "Music
for Queen Mary"
by Henry Purcell,
performed by The
Monteverdi Choir and
Orchestra, The Equale
Brass Ensemble

Choreography
Alberto Testa
Costume Design
Carlo Diappi
Wardrobe Supervisor
Clara Fratarcangelli

Make-up Artist
Rino Carboni

Hair
Aldo Signoretti
Titles/Opticals
Arane

Sound Editors
Michele Boehm
Dialogue:
Peter Musgrave
Colin Miller
Sound Recordists
Ian Voigt
Michel Voinnet
Dolby stereo

Post-synchronisation
Co-ordinator:
Rudolf Wichmann
Supervisor:
Leslie Hodgson

Foley Walkers
Jerome Lévy
Laurent Lévy
Stunt Co-ordinator
Neno Zamperla

Stunts
Claudio Pacifico
Virgilio Ponti
Angelo Ragusa
Rinaldo Zamperla
Armourers
Gregorio Simili
Celeste Franzi

Cast

Timothy Dalton
King Vittorio Amadeo
Valeria Golino
Jeanne de Luynes
Stéphane Freiss
Count Di Verua
Robin Renucci
Charles de Luynes
Margaret Tyack
Dowager Countess
Feodor Chaliapin
Scaglia
Eleanor David
Queen
Paul Crauchet
Duke of Luynes
Amy Werba
Heloise
Francesca Reggiani
Marie Christine
Dominique Marcas
Cook
Leonardo Ruta
Prince Vittorio
Arnoldo Foa
Gigi Bonos
Priests
Elizabeth Kaza
Madame Trevie
Lea Padovani
Madame Cumiana
Anna Bonaiuto
Madame Longhi
Caterina Vertova
Madame Bassani
Rosa Di Brigida
Emilia
Matteo Dondi
Luchino
Marne Maitland
Count Trevie
William Berger
Count Longhi

Ugo Fangareggi
Doctor
Stefano Molinari
Steward
Giampiero Tomasini
Sergeant
Frederico Pacifici
Salvatore Loriga
Courtiers
Franco Valobra
Duke of Aosta
Roberto Visconti
Huntsman
Milly Corinaldi
Sacristy's Nun
Paolo Paolini
Longhi's Lackey
Bettine Milne
Servant
Friedrich Von Thun
Karl Von
Schwarzenberg
Robert Spafford
William of Nassau
Venantino Venantini
Luis de Arragon
Russel Case
Officer

Stefano Cedrati
Guard
Arcangelo Fino
Falconer
Ellen Sterling
Nun
Pino de Matti
Equerry
Charles Borromel
Alex Serra
Wardens
Sacha Darwin
Elisabetta Darida
Courtisans
Salvatore Bartilotta
Elderly Courtier

English version

8,369 feet
93 minutes

Italy, 1683. Alessandro, the King's Chamberlain, marries Jeanne, a young French woman. When she comes to live with Alessandro at court, the King becomes obsessed with her, but Jeanne ignores him and announces that she is pregnant. However, the couple's happiness is soon cut short as the King maliciously sends Alessandro to Spain on a diplomatic mission, leaving Jeanne alone at court. When she resists heavy pressure from Alessandro's family and the rest of the court to have an affair with the King, her new-born son is taken away from her so that she can spend more time with the King.

One night, the King visits Jeanne at her house in Rivoli, declaring his love for her. She rejects his advances and sends for Alessandro. When he returns, Alessandro appears disappointed that Jeanne hasn't given herself to the King. A distraught Jeanne immediately rushes to Rome, offering herself to the King on the understanding that Alessandro's family lose both their home and their position at court. Jeanne begins to exert growing political power, resulting in a disastrous war between Italy and France over Piedmont. When Jeanne falls sick with smallpox, the King ignores the impending defeat and decides to nurse her back to health; consequently, he is forced to sign an armistice with the French.

After recovering, Jeanne decides to flee Italy with Alessandro and her son, but although she reaches France, they are both caught. The King kills Alessandro in a brutal fight and suffers a nervous breakdown. Jeanne suddenly returns to court and offers to stay with the King but he declines, realising the danger she is in, and tells her to leave Italy for good. She finally settles in Paris with her son.

Although co-scripted by Daniel Vigne, director/co-writer of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, *The King's Whore* has little in common with *Guerre's* 16th-century courtroom drama, beyond a similar mix of popular folklore and historical truth. Certainly it fails to reproduce any of that film's gusto

or tragic force. Instead, we're given an unadventurous period romance, ponderously filmed with a sybaritic emphasis on 'tasteful' costume, hair, music and interiors. This enthusiasm for a romantic, antique Europe reveals the film's conservative nature. Fetishising the pomp and ceremony of court life, *The King's Whore* reworks these elements into a nostalgic vision of pre-industrial Europe.

With only two action sequences in its entire length, the film plays down the potentially more exciting ingredients of a historical romp in favour of the central love story, an absurd *ménage à trois* that produces many passionate but ultimately banal meditations about loyalty, love and obsession. Even when viewed in the context of the romance genre – a genre that often lends itself to an oppositional reading – *The King's Whore* still remains true to its stolid retro tendency, consistently diluting any progressive elements that emerge from the nominally female-centred narrative.

For example, where Jeanne, a seemingly typical romantic heroine, is initially situated at the heart of the film, her point of view – often privileged above others – is gradually swept aside by the King's, as his obsession with her begins to dominate. This causes Jeanne's happy marriage, defined originally as the romantic ideal, to be replaced with the King's brutal infatuation. It is finally his violent, destructive desire that becomes the greatest romantic force in the film, replacing the feminised Romeo and Juliet figures of Alessandro and Jeanne.

Framed as it all is by a multitude of less than effective performances – from the hordes of craggy court elders to Golino's Jeanne and Dalton's King – the film even manages to undermine its own romantic ambition. *The King's Whore* is an unattractive affair, whose greatest achievement would be to drive a stake through the heart of this type of European co-production, a pimp that has already sold us *Christopher Columbus: The Discovery*.

Jason Drake



Bond in brocade: Timothy Dalton

Mad Dog and Glory

USA 1992

Director: John McNaughton

Certificate
15

Distributor
UIP

Production Company
Universal

Executive Producer
Richard Price

Producers
Barbara De Fina
Martin Scorsese

Co-producer
Steven A. Jones

Production Co-ordinator
Terri Clemens

Unit Production Manager
Deborah Lee

Location Manager
Betsy Bottando

Casting
Todd Thaler

Assistant Directors
Amy Sayres
Douglas S. Ornstein
Dave Hallinan

Screenplay
Richard Price

Director of Photography
Robby Müller

Colour
Technicolor

Additional Photography
Jeffrey Jur

Camera/Steadicam Operator
Gerrit Dangremond

Editors
Craig McKay
Elena Maganini

Production Designer
David Chapman

Art Director
Mark Haack

Set Decorator
Leslie Pope

Set Dressers
Harry B. Hoynes
Timothy W. Tiedje

Storyboard Artist
Frank Coronado

Special Effects
Edward Drohan

Music
Elmer Bernstein

Orchestrations
Emilie A. Bernstein

Music Editors
Joseph S. DeBeasi
Additional:
Suzana Peric

Songs
"Hand on The Pump" by Lawrence Muggerrud, Louis Freeze, Brett Bouldin, performed by Cypress Hill; "That Old Black Magic" by Harold Arlen, Johnny Mercer, performed by Louis Prima, Keely Smith; "Mixed Up, Shook Up Girl" by Willy DeVille, performed by Mink DeVille; "Love and Happiness" by Al Green, Mabon Hodges, performed by Al Green; "Iceblink Luck" by Elizabeth Fraser, Robin Guthrie, Simon Raymonde, performed by Cocteau Twins; "Twice As Hard" by Chris Robinson, Rick Robinson, performed by Black Crowes; "Oh Girl" by Eugene Record, performed by The Chi-Lites; "Midnight Train to Georgia" by James Weatherly, performed by Gladys Knight & The Pips; "Just a Gigolo"

I Ain't Got Nobody
by Irving Caesar, Leo Naeello Casucci, Spencer Williams, Roger Graham, performed by Louis Prima

Costume Design
Rita Ryack

Wardrobe Supervisor
Kaye Nottbusch

Make-up
Ilona Herman
Nena Smarz
Gunnar Swanson

Special Make-up
Neal Martz

Title Design
Steve Musgrave

Opticals
The Effects House

Additional:
Sinott & Associates

Supervising Sound Editor
Philip Stockton

Dialogue Editor
Marissa Littlefield

ADR Editor
Gail Showalter

Foley Supervisor
Bruce Pross

Foley Editors
Frank Kern
Steven Visscher
Eliza Paley

Sound Recordists
James J. Sabat

Music:
Alan Silverman
Dolby stereo

Consultant:
Robert S. Warren

Sound Re-recorder
Lee Dichter

Sound Effects Editors
Ron Bochar
Skip Lievsay

Foley Artist
Marko A. Costanzo

Key Technical Adviser
John S. Redmond

Stunt Co-ordinator
Doug Coleman

Stunts
A. Michael Lerner

Cast
Robert De Niro
Wayne
Uma Thurman
Glory
Bill Murray
Frank
David Caruso
Mike
Mike Starr
Harold
Tom Towles
Andrew
Kathy Baker
Lee
Derek Anunciation
Shooter
Doug Hara
Driver
Evan Lionel
Dealer in Car
Anthony Cannata
Pavletz
J.J. Johnston
Shanlon
Guy Van Swearingen
Cop
Jack Wallace
Tommy
Richard Belzer
M.C./Comic
Clem Caserta
Guy at Table
Fred Squillo
Chuck Parelo
Frank's Gang

Tony Fitzpatrick
Eric Young
Bruce Jarchow
Detectives at Crime Scene
Bob Rice
Uniform Cop
William King
Kevin Hurley
Dealers in the Park
Richard Price
Detective in Restaurant
John J. Polce
Dispatcher
Dick Sollenberger
Saul
Paula Killen
Irene
Eddie "Bo" Smith
Big John

Gilbert Cruz
Lou Eppolito
David Forsyth
Seth Gilliam
George Gonneau
Shelley Love Latham
Pamela Lewis
Dominic Marcus
Rosalinde Milan
Craig Sechler
Rose Stockton
Chandra Wilson

8,740 feet
97 minutes

A Chicago ghetto. A crack deal goes fatally wrong, and two dead bodies are left in an abandoned car. While at the scene of the crime, police evidence technician and photographer Wayne 'Mad Dog' Dobie is caught up in a nearby supermarket robbery; the perpetrator of the crack murders has killed the store's manager and is holding a gun to a customer's head. Although indecisive, even craven (his 'Mad Dog' sobriquet is ironic), Dobie diffuses the situation. Later, he discovers that the customer whose life he inadvertently saved is local crime boss and club owner Frank Milo. The grateful Milo sends a henchman to escort Dobie to his club, where he performs an occasional stand-up routine. The lonely, isolated Dobie becomes caught up in Milo's aggressive bonhomie, and over the course of a drunken night, they confess their respective dreams and disappointments.

Milo ends the night with a vague promise that he can realise Dobie's dreams, but the cop thinks no more of it until Glory, a young girl who tends the bar at Milo's club, turns up at his apartment - a 'gift' from Milo for seven days. Disturbed by this intrusion into his well-ordered world, the ineffectual Dobie fails to act. Milo continues to worm his way into Dobie's life, and takes to turning up at his office with cake and comedy routines for Dobie's fellow officers. Only Dobie's hot-tempered and decisive partner Mike sees through Milo's front.

Glory pleads with Dobie not to 'return' her, as she is working out a form of contract with Milo, in order to pay off a debt her brother owes. Dobie and Glory sleep together, and Dobie wonders if he is in love. When he decides that he is, he tries to annul the 'seven-day contract' with Milo, who is put out, but willing to accept financial recompense. Dobie tries but fails to raise the money, and when Mike works out what is going on, he is enlisted as Dobie's own bodyguard. After various contretemps, Dobie challenges Milo himself to a fist fight to decide the outcome. Glory, who has left in exasperation at the men's bartering over her, returns to embrace the bruised but not beaten Dobie.

Like the recent *Night and the City* - also developed by and starring Robert De Niro, also written by Richard Price, also based on the bar-room spiels and bartered fantasies of

small-timer US street life - *Mad Dog and Glory* is a tender-hearted paean to flawed guys with fond hearts, gimpy guys with redemptive goals. It's an urban fairy tale - with Uma Thurman as the princess in the loft-conversion tower, De Niro as the Knight in Shining Armour and Bill Murray, craftily cast against type, as a manipulative Mafia boss, the dark *deus ex machina* who brings together the clean-souled lovers.

De Niro's forensics expert worries over his evidential police work and settles into a safely stalled midlife slump. A chance meeting with Murray's shark-skin-suited Mephistopheles changes everything. Price's script makes Dobie take a succession of hairpin transitions through a bottleneck of registers - police-procedural; wiseguy badinage; a cooped-up and lonely cop; a poor sap pricked by the rejuvenescence of love.

McNaughton kicks off with a swerve across the generic crime scene, cleverly deploying Dobie's own lens: he seems to be setting us up for another edge-city game of crazy gazing (cf. the appallingly effective video lo-jinks in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*). Then McNaughton's hold on *Mad Dog and Glory* just seems to go. He can't seem to hook Price's points-spread of proliferating games onto any holding rhythm - there's literally no sense of transition here, with the actors shuttled artlessly from set piece to set piece (at times, it feels like a parody of David Mamet's sometimes staginess). The mood veers from outbreaks of modish violence - clod's law - to anachronistic and gormless sentimentality. There is a patently misjudged sex scene - doubly superfluous, because the erotic charge between 'Mad Dog' and Glory has already been subtly (dis)played. Elmer Bernstein's *noir-ish* score - capably retro, wearily strident - also comes across as misplaced.

There are some compensatory pleasures in the minor roles. David Caruso, as Wayne's fiery partner Mike, is as badgeringly intense as he was in a similar role in Ferrara's *King of New York*. Mike Starr as Frank's physically hulking but

mentally limping bodyguard is also fun. And Bill Murray is impetuously apt as Frank - that gamey face giving off an air of serene reptilian malevolence. He seems to have *straightened up* into the part, losing the slouchy ballast of old and gaining streaky inches, so that his snidey eye-line always seems high above De Niro's blinky little boffin. De Niro does his now patented - patently off-the-peg - Mr Normal routine (familiar from *Falling in Love*, *Stanley and Iris*, *Awakenings*) and is all too convincingly dull. You're not exactly burning to see further inside Wayne's world, and Glory's conversion to this sweet-natured plodder is implausible. Price's macho fantasy smells way past its dwell-by date.

McNaughton seems to be laying out a critique of homogenised movie machismo, but he ends up colluding in Price's delusions rather than cauterising their flow: the tough guys just end up coming to blows; the tender girl just ends up a quiescent (g)love puppet. Price is not exactly renowned for his memorable female characters, and *Mad Dog's* is par for the course. And although McNaughton gets all coy about *not* showing Uma Thurman nude - he comes across as simultaneously furtive and nervously noble New Man - the film degrades her thoroughly enough anyway in the passive thrust of her Glory role.

Mad Dog and Glory has enough competing vectors to fuel at least three other, potentially more convincing movies; it is frustratingly haphazard, speared on its inability to choose a single, singular way to go. There's no sign that McNaughton gets in to this material to move it, guide it, and no alienation-effect riffing, either, as in his *Henry*. There's no stylistic vigour, outside of the edgily violent opening minutes, whose every texture (a pared-down monochrome which lasts only as long as the prologue) might be seen as a sad referential nod to the lost independence of *Henry*, and to a *Mad Dog and Glory* McNaughton maybe once envisaged but somehow lost.

Ian Penman



A sap in love: Uma Thurman, Robert De Niro

Madame Bovary

France 1991

Director: Claude Chabrol

Certificate
PG

Distributor
Arrow

Production Company
MK2 Productions
In association with
CED Productions
FR3 Films

Producer
Marin Karmitz
Production Managers
Yvon Crenn
Patrice Lhuillier
Assistant Directors
Alain Wermus
Cécile Maistre

Screenplay
Claude Chabrol
Based on the novel
by Gustave Flaubert
Director of Photography
Jean Rabier
In colour

Editor
Monique Fardoulis

Set Design
Michèle Abbé

Set Decorators
Jacques Mollon

Claude Sune
Serge Le Puil
Jean Colin
Annette Stall
Jean-René Coulon
Pierre Galliard
Albert Carigi

Music
Matthieu Chabrol

Music Director
Michel Ganot

Music Extracts
"Bourrée
Campagnarde" by
Jean-Michel Tavernier;
"Lucia Di

Lammermoor" by
Gaetano Donizetti;
"Piano Sonata K544
in B flat major" by
Scarlatti; "Les voix
du printemps",
"Blue Danube"
by Johann Strauss

Arrangements
Jean-Michel Bernard

Orchestrations
Maurice Coignard

Costume Design
Corinne Jorry

Wardrobe
Cristine Guégan

Additional:
Hélène Robin
Marie-Claude Brunet
Alain D'Ulivo

Anne-Marie
Castano-Padovan

Sabrina Kamina
Giles Bodu

Make-up
Catherine

Demasmacker
Additional:
Elisabeth Perchet

Sandrine Coraux
Sound Editor
Brigitte Grynblat

Sound Recordist
Jean-Bernard

Thomasson
Sound Re-recordist
Maurice Gilbert

Sound Effects
André Naudin

Gadou Naudin

Cast

Isabelle Huppert
Emma Bovary
Jean-François Balmer
Charles Bovary
Christophe Malavoy
Rodolphe Boulanger
Jean Yanne
Monsieur Homais

Lucas Belvaux
Léon Dupuis

Jean-Louis Maury
Monsieur Lheureux

Florent Gibassier
Widow Lefrançois

Jean-Claude Bouillaud
Monsieur Rouault

Sabelline Campo
Félicité

Yves Verhoeven
Justin

Marie Mergey
Charles Bovary's

Mother
François Maistre

Lieuvain
Dominique Clément

Madame Homais
Etienne Draber

Maître Guillaumin
Jacques Dynam

Abbé Bournisien
Pierre-François Dumeniaud

Hivert
Christine Paolini

Mère Rolet
Thomas Chabrol

Vicomte
Henri Attal

Maître Hareng
André Thorent

Dr Canivet
Dominique Zardi

Blind Man
Gillette Barbier

Natasie
François Périer

Narrator
Philippe Abitol

Henry Ambert
Jean-Marie Arnoux

William Clément
Olga Colin

Claire Dalsace
Catherine Deville

Julien Dubois
Michel Dupuy

Marie Guyot
Jean Joulin

Jean-Jacques Lagarde
Louis de Lencquesaing

René Marjac
Pierre Martot

Bernard Mazzinghi
Mona Muche

Claude Pascadel
Christian Paumelle

Valérie Soudant
Tina Sportolaro

Aleksandr Vatkovic
Philippe Verquin

Pierre Vielhescaze

11,639 feet
129 minutes

Subtitles

Village doctor Charles Bovary meets Emma Rouault while he is treating her father's broken leg and they marry shortly after. Emma is happy at first, but an invitation to a society ball kindles her social aspirations and she becomes discontented. Her deteriorating health leads Charles to abandon his practice in Tostes and take another in Yonville, a larger town. Emma's condition improves and she gives birth to a daughter, Berthe.

Charles falls under the influence of Homais, the local pharmacist, and Emma is attracted to Léon Dupuis, a law clerk. The attraction is frustrated when he leaves for Paris to study and, feeling stifled at home, Emma increasingly loses interest in caring for her husband and daughter. She begins an affair with the dashing Rodolphe Boulanger, a local landowner, which offers her the passion and excitement lacking in her domestic life.

Enlivened by the affair, Emma becomes more attentive to Berthe and Charles, encouraging her husband in his efforts at pioneering surgery. But when an operation goes disastrously wrong, she regards him with contempt. Becoming more desperate, Emma persuades Rodolphe to run away with her, but he reneges on his promise, whereupon she succumbs to listless depression.

At the opera in Rouen with Charles, Emma encounters Léon. The two start a passionate affair. Emma buys more and more expensive clothes, incurring debts with the unscrupulous haberdasher Lheureux. As the debts spiral, she persuades her husband to grant her power of attorney over their financial affairs, using their situation to find excuses for visiting Léon in Rouen. The debts are called in and, when they cannot be paid, the town bailiff arrives to repossess the Bovary property. The distraught Emma turns to Léon and Rodolphe, but neither is willing to help her. In despair, Emma poisons herself with arsenic from Homais' pharmacy and suffers an excruciatingly slow death, her uncomprehending husband at her side.

Chabrol's declared intention in filming *Madame Bovary* was "to make the film Flaubert would have made had he had a camera instead of a pen." The film received a favourable response from French critics for its fidelity to the original. But what gets lost in adapting a literary classic for the screen is often as revealing as what remains. It's here that the "Chabrol touch" surfaces in what is otherwise strictly "filmed Flaubert".

The beginning and end of the novel have gone - Charles' childhood, the repercussions of Emma's suicide and her husband's discovery of Léon's and Rodolphe's letters to her are elided, which reduces identification with Charles. The director has also transposed the collective narratorial voice of the novel - the Flaubertian "we" - into the Olympian objectivity of the Chabrol camera. The process of condensation includes reorganising



Daydream believer: Isabelle Huppert

details from the novel; for example, Charles' garbled giving of his name as "Charbovari" is relocated from his schooldays to his first meeting with Emma. This marks the catastrophic mutual misunderstanding that characterises their marriage.

It is surprising that Chabrol should come to Flaubert so late in his career, since the novel is the Ur-text of themes in his work from *Le Beau Serge* to *Les Biches* and *Masques*: stultifying French provincial life, the self-destructive pursuit of illusory desires and bourgeois duplicity. Isabelle Huppert seems to have replaced Stéphane Audran as the director's *actrice fétiche* - this is her third role for Chabrol following award-winning performances in *Violette Nozière* and *Une Affaire des femmes*. Chabrol has whittled away the viewpoints of other characters to install Huppert centre-stage. Her Emma alternates between terrifying self-absorption and Charcot-style *attitudes passionnelles*. At the same time, she displays a combination of petulance and defiance, crystallised in the moment when - having swallowed a handful of arsenic - she turns to the camera, her mouth smeared with the white powder, an image of her final gesture of impetuosity and indulgence.

Fassbinder commented that Chabrol's attitude to his characters resembles that of an entomologist observing them like insects in a glass cage. This particular glass cage is extremely well decorated, a sumptuous addition to the French heritage cycle, superior to the picture-book aesthetic of Claude Berri's Pagnol adaptations and offering a diseased Romantic vision which runs counter to the heartiness of Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Chabrol's film was only made possible by the last-minute intervention of the television channel FR3, and there are aspects of its formal organisation - its pace and cutting, emphatic punctuation-by-fades and redundant narrative voice-over - that make it suitable for television serialisation.

The irony is that Chabrol has here made exactly the sort of faithful literary adaptation that the *Nouvelle Vague* once condemned as *le cinéma de papa* - respectful, luxurious and eminently forgettable.

Chris Darke

El maestro de esgrima (The Fencing Master)

Spain 1992

Director: Pedro Olea

Certificate
12

Distributor
Mayfair Entertainment

Production Companies
Origen Producciones
Cinematograficas/
Altube Filmeak

In association with
ICAA

Executive Producer
Antonio Cardenal

Producers
Antonio Cardenal
Pedro Olea

Production Co-ordinator
Inigo Marco

Production Manager
Antonio Guillen Rey

Assistant Directors
José Luis Escobar
Hector Carre

Screenplay
Antonio Larreta
Francisco Frada

Arturo Pérez Reverte
Pedro Olea

Based on the novel by
Arturo Pérez Reverte

Director of Photography
Alfredo Mayo

In colour
Editor
José Salcedo

Art Director
Luis Valles

Special Effects Supervisor
Pedro Balandin

Special Effects
Julio Pimentel
Pedro Parra

Miguel Soler
Salvador Martos

Alvaro Quiroga
Inocencio Losada

Alejandro Cobo
Joaquín López

Jesus Riaran
Ma del Pilar Navarro

Music
José Nieto

Music Extract
"Addio del passato"

from *La Traviata*
by Giuseppe Verdi,

performed by
Orquesta de la Radio
de Bratislava,

Henrieta Lednarova
Costume Design
Javier Artinano

Costume Supervisor
Teresa García Trueba

Make-up
Romana Gonzalez

Hairdresser
Josefa Morales

Titles/Opticals
Story Films/
Pablo Nunez

7,927 feet
88 minutes

Subtitles

Sound Recordists

Eduardo Fernandez
Music:

José Vinader
Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
Alberto Herena

Manuel Cora
Fencing Expert
Francisco Fuentes

Arms Expert
Joaquín Parra

Cast
Omero Antonutti

Don Jaime de Astarloa
Assumpta Serna

Adela de Otero
Joaquín de Almeida

Marques Luis de Ayala
José Luis López Vázquez

Campillo
Miguel Rellan

Carceles
Alberto Closas

Salanova
Elisa Matilla

Lucia
Ramon Goyanes

Isidro
Juan Jesus Valverde

Carreno
Francisco Vidal

Romero
Tomas Repila

Gustavo
Marcos Tizon

Alejandro
Miguel Angel Salomon

Heraldico
Sonsol Benedicto

Rosa
Pablo Vina

Ayala's Servant
Roberto Diaz Gomar

Cabo
Rafael Vaquero

Rioseco
Carmen Segarra

Julia
Anunciata Diaz-Agero

Soprano
José Antonio Campos

Policeman

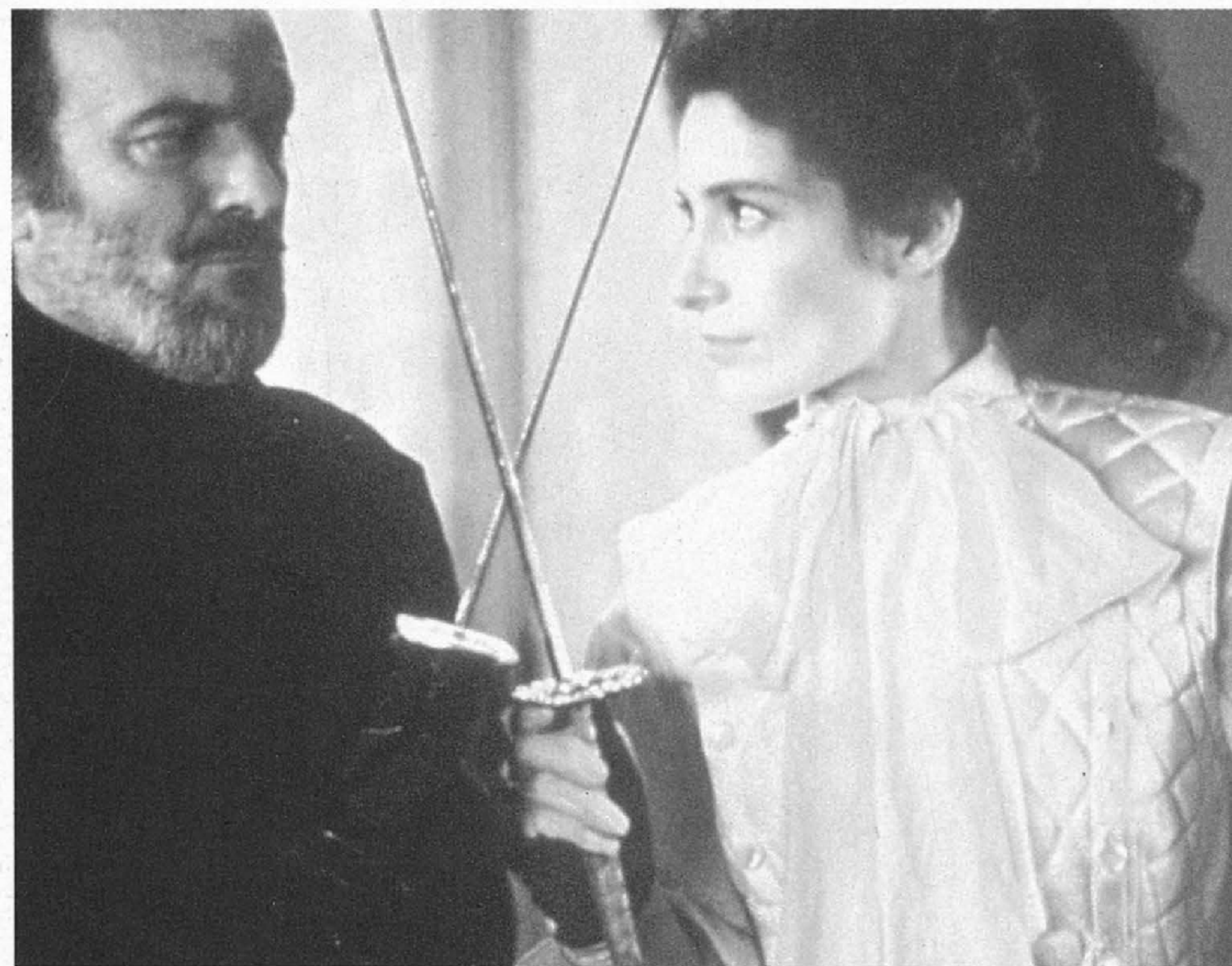
Madrid, 1868. Fencing master Don Jaime de Astarloa visits his pupils, grandsons of the banker Salanova, for their weekly lesson. Single-mindedly dedicated to his art, he takes little interest in the political crisis rocking Spain: discontent with Queen Isabella, and agitation for the return of the exiled republican General Prim. Home in his study, Jaime works on his long-planned treatise on the art of fencing. He is interrupted by Adela de Otero, an enigmatic woman who asks to become his pupil. ►

◀ Jaime refuses, but is won over by her beauty and skill with the rapier. As the lessons proceed, he becomes captivated and teaches her his deadly secret – a lethal thrust to the throat. Another of his pupils, the Marques Luis de Ayala, comments on the unwonted smartness of Jaime's dress, and is intrigued to hear about Adela.

Jaime takes Adela to a lecture by an Italian fencing master, where Luis introduces himself to her. Soon afterwards she cancels her lessons, and – to Jaime's chagrin – is seen in public with Luis. Calling on Jaime, Luis entrusts him with politically compromising letters; a few days later he is found killed by a rapier thrust to the throat. Jaime takes the letters to his friend, the radical journalist Carceles. Adela is reported missing: there is blood in her apartment, and a body – seemingly hers – is taken from the river. Revisiting Carceles, Jaime finds him brutally tortured and the letters stolen; he chases the thief, who escapes in a carriage bearing a heraldic device Jaime had noticed among Adela's possessions.

Paying a final visit to Salanova, who is sending his grandsons to Switzerland for safety, Jaime sees the same device on the banker's carriage. Adela, who had faked her own death, comes to Jaime's apartment seeking one missing letter, the most crucial of all. She admits killing Luis on Salanova's orders, and while making advances to Jaime tries to stab him. They duel, and Jaime – though hampered by a buttoned foil – manages to kill her. As Isabella's deposition and the return of Prim are announced, Jaime sits burning the manuscript of his treatise.

● “Feelings are never pure,” Adela de Otero tells the fencing master Don Jaime, just before trying to kill him. “You still believe in good and bad.” *The Fencing Master* is a study of a man out of his time, dedicated to a skill and a code of honour which, even in Spain, had by the mid-nineteenth century become laughably outmoded. During a key scene at the opera house a soprano sings “Addio del passato” (Farewell to the past) from *La Traviata*.



Foiled again: Omero Antonutti, Assumpta Serna

When we next hear the aria, it's over the final image of Don Jaime destroying his life's work. Contemptuously shutting out the present, he tries to cling to an idealised past, but in the end that too is lost to him.

The use of a Verdian *leitmotif* is apt: the film draws on operatic conventions, but plays them against the grain, with none of the high spirits one usually expects from swordplay movies. Instead the prevailing mood is elegiac, at times almost devotional, with interiors shot in a dusty, smoky light as though in some library or convent where the past clogs the very atmosphere. “Fencing is like communion,” Don Jaime tells Luis, “one must be in the right frame of mind.” Luis, frivolous and philandering, neglects his advice and so falls easy prey to Adela.

Though couched in the form of a period thriller, *The Fencing Master* scarcely tries to mystify us: it's fairly evident from the start what's going on, and the outcome of the final duel comes as no surprise. What concerns Olea and his screenwriters – who include the author of the original novel, Arturo Pérez Reverte – is character as fate, the way people's emotional configurations turn them and can be turned against them. Adela (a witty, acute Assumpta Serna) seizes on Jaime's predilections no less than those of Luis – and in her turn is exploited, through her taste for intrigue, by Salanova.

The film's chief fault is that it's all a little too neat and thought-out. Its greatest asset is the moving performance of Omero Antonutti, a Taviani regular, who plays Don Jaime as a man teetering on the brink of old age, faced with the belated resurgence of emotions he had long since rejected yet never subconsciously ceased to hanker after. As the turmoil of his feelings matches the turmoil of the streets outside, his stance and gait seem to shed the years. And in the coda, as he sits watching his whole life literally turn to ashes, the austere misery of his expression rescues the scene from romantic cliché.

Philip Kemp

Mistress

USA 1992

Director: Barry Primus

Certificate
15

Distributor
Arrow Films

Production Company
Tribeca productions
of a Mistress
production

Executive Producer
Ruth Charney

Producers
Meir Teper
Robert De Niro

Co-producer
Bertil Ohlsson

Line Producer
Avi Kleinberger

Production Co-ordinator
Thomas D. Adelman

Unit Production Manager
Avi Kleinberger

Location Manager
Jack Kney

**Post-production
Supervisor**
Andrew Golov

Casting
Gail Levin

NY:
Todd Thaler

Assistant Directors
Bruce Franklin
Jeff Rafner

Screenplay
Barry Primus
Jonathan Lawton

Director of Photography
Sven Kirsten

Colour
CFI

Camera Operator
Eyal Gordin

Opticals
Pacific Title

Editor
Steven Weisberg

Production Designer
Phil Peters

Art Director
Randy Eriksen

Set Design
Colin de Rouin

Set Decorator
K.C. Fox

Set Dressers
Mark “Travis” Little
Adam Mead Faletti

Draughtsman
Hector Velez

Sketch Artist
Sabrina Silver

Scenic Artists
Phillip Schneider
Celia A. Parker

Special Effects
Roscoe Fowler

Models
Hector Velez
Gwendolyn E. Witkin

Music
Galt MacDermot

Music Extract
“Brandenburg
Concerto No. 6,
1st Movement”
by J.S. Bach, performed
by The Hamburg
Chamber Orchestra

Music Supervising Editor
Jamie Gelb

Songs
“Sex Goddess”,
“The Kiss” by Galt
MacDermot, Gerome
Ragni, James Rado;
“Out of My Hands”
by and performed by
Anthony Crawford;
“Mitch's Birthday
Song” by Galt
MacDermot; “These
Are the Things We
Cannot Change” by
Galt MacDermot,
William Dumare

Choreography
Julie Arenal

Costume Design
Susan Nininger

Costume Supervisor
Kimberly Guenther

Make-up
Ilona Herman
Jo-Anne Smith-Ojeil

Title Design
Dorne Huebler

Supervising Sound Editor
Barney Cabral

Sound Editors
Toby Brown
Kelly Cabral

Don Crosby
Philip Haberman
Richard Raderman

ADR Editor
Norto Sepulveda

Sound Recordists
Jacob Goldstein
Brion Paccasi

Music:
Dennis Sands

ADR Recordists
Ed Golya
Alan Holly

Paul J. Zydel
Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
Matthew Iadarola
Stanley Kastner
T.A. Moore Jnr
Tom Perry

Foley Artists
Patrick Cabral
Diane Marshall

Special Consultant
Phil Waxman

Stunt Co-ordinator
Clay Boss

Choreography
Julie Arenal

Costume Design
Susan Nininger

Costume Supervisor
Kimberly Guenther

Make-up
Ilona Herman
Jo-Anne Smith-Ojeil

Title Design
Dorne Huebler

Supervising Sound Editor
Barney Cabral

Sound Editors
Toby Brown
Kelly Cabral

Don Crosby
Philip Haberman
Richard Raderman

ADR Editor
Norto Sepulveda

Sound Recordists
Jacob Goldstein
Brion Paccasi

Music:
Dennis Sands

ADR Recordists
Ed Golya
Alan Holly

Paul J. Zydel
Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
Matthew Iadarola
Stanley Kastner
T.A. Moore Jnr
Tom Perry

Foley Artists
Patrick Cabral
Diane Marshall

Special Consultant
Phil Waxman

Stunt Co-ordinator
Clay Boss

Film Extract
Le Grande Illusion (1937)

Cast
Danny Aiello
Carmine Rasso

Robert De Niro
Evan M. Wright

Martin Landau
Jack Roth

Eli Wallach
George Lieberhoff

Robert Wuhl
Marvin Landisman

Jace Alexander
Stuart Stratland

Christopher Walken
Warren Zell

Sheryl Lee Ralph
Beverly Dumont

Laurie Metcalfe
Rachel Landisman

Tuesday Knight
Peggy Pauline

Jean Smart
Patricia Riley

Vasek C. Simek
Hans

Tomas R. Voth
Stagehand

Mary Mercier
Shelby's Waitress

Bill Rotko
Valet

Dimitri Dimitrov
Maitre D'

Chuck Lowe
Bernie

Ernest Borgnine
Ernest Borgnine

Frida S. Aradottir
Mrs Evan M. Wright
Raphaella Rose Primus
Raphaella M. Wright
Stefan Gierasch
Stratland Snr
Michael Kelley
Guard at Gate
Jerome Dempsey
Mitch
Roberta Wallach
Nancy
Kathleen Johnson
Party Guest

Leata Galloway
Nina Small
Tim Bagley
Byron Simpson
Debbie L. James
Dawn Hopper
Mitch's Singing
Students
Deirdre Hade
Peter Kalos
Partygoers
Gretchen Becker
Hamburger Girl
Eileen Wilkinson
Astrolger

9,872 feet
110 minutes

● Hollywood. Jack Roth, a veteran small-time producer, still plugs away in the hope of making a picture. He contacts Marvin Landisman, a once promising writer-director, and offers to try and produce one of his old scripts. Jack introduces Marvin to Stuart, a young writer and the son of an award-winning screenwriter; Stuart will also work on the project. They discuss Marvin's script, about an artist who kills himself. Jack promises to introduce Marvin to George, a financier, though Marvin begins to harbour doubts when it transpires that the financier has a girlfriend who wants to be an actress.

Marvin hears from his wife Rachel, who is in New York planning their move back to the city. Marvin meets George and his girlfriend Peggy; to his horror, Peggy wants the lead role in the film. He auditions her and she proves to be terrible. Later George announces that he is no longer interested in the project, as Peggy has landed a part in a horror film. Jack then approaches Carmine, another financier with an aspiring comedienne girlfriend, Patricia. Marvin is asked to make the film “funnier” to accommodate Patricia's ambitions. Carmine agrees to fund the film halfway and promises to introduce Jack to another financier, Evan. Evan is willing to put up the rest of the budget but stipulates further changes to make the project “more commercial”. Evan introduces the team to Beverly, his girlfriend, who turns out to be both determined and talented; she is also having an affair with Carmine. George comes back on the scene, so Marvin must find a part for Peggy, whom Stuart now falls in love with.

Rachel arrives, and is shocked that Marvin is willing to compromise on his script, which is based on the life of his best friend Warren – an actor who played the lead in Marvin's first film, and who committed suicide because Marvin compromised himself on the ending. Rachel leaves Marvin and returns to New York. Marvin discovers that Stuart has changed the script beyond recognition. He and Stuart have a fight which is broken up by Stuart's cynical alcoholic father. Marvin decides to make the film, changes and all. Jack draws up contracts with the financiers and all are due to sign during a party George is throwing. At the party, things go awry: Patricia confronts Marvin and asks him if he



A touch of class: Eli Wallach

knows anything about Carmine and Beverly; Beverly learns that she is to be killed off after three scenes; George discovers Stuart and Peggy together; Beverly and Evan have a tiff; unhappy with the terms of the deal, the financiers refuse to sign the contract. Jack, Marvin and Stuart leave empty-handed and Marvin finds work on a cable show. Weeks later, Jack rings him up to tell him about another financier he has met; the weary Marvin hesitates, then agrees to a meeting.

In Hollywood, it seems, every aspiring filmmaker has to have some major cinematic touchstone as a sign of intellectual intention. In *The Player*, Griffin Mill finds the aggrieved screenwriter David Kahane in a flea-pit watching *Bicycle Thieves*. For Marvin Landisman, the beleaguered hyphenate hero of *Mistress*, it is *La Grande Illusion*, which he screens for himself in the comfort of his own lounge.

If only they had chosen to watch *Sunset Boulevard* or *The Bad and the Beautiful* instead, they might have saved themselves a lot of trouble. It's the sad downfall of the Kahanes and Landismans of this world that they should still cling to quaint notions of artistic integrity in a town of high concepts and low morals. We all know that Hollywood kills the creative spirit and some. One wonders in what deluded state they arrived there in the first place. Landisman's screenplay *The Darkness and the Light*, about a painter who would rather kill himself than compromise his vision, sounds such a lousy idea that one is tempted to say its author deserves to be taught a lesson.

As a sluggish satire on the vicissitudes of Hollywood, *Mistress* lamely follows in the steps of *The Player* and the lesser *The Big Picture*. But this film is not about studio politics, rather the low-life fringes of Tinseltown where the meetings take place over salt-beef sandwiches in diners rather than cocktails at the St James Club. The key players include the doddery George, who revels in the title of "garbage king of

Newark" and likes to wear his shirts unbuttoned to reveal his grey-haired chest. It is the world of the exploitation flick - where the 'artsy' film has a chance but, as the slick Evan comments, only as long as it has a lot of sex. Director Barry Primus and co-screenwriter Jonathan L. Lawton (who wrote *Pretty Woman* and therefore knows a thing or two about executive interference) pack the film with the more obvious observations on the lunacies of the industry and the strange things that happen to those who truck with it. Marvin approaches his day job shooting instructional videos with all the seriousness of an auteur. Jack reminisces about the good old days at Universal, "when Nick Ray threw a projector through the window". Young Stuart is considered a hot shot because he studied with Spielberg's teacher at Cal Tech; but more importantly his dad is a famous, if washed-up, screenwriter: "The kid's on spec - we get the father for free."

In Hollywood everyone ends up prostituting themselves - it's the old laboured joke at the centre of the film. Alongside it are all the old laboured jokes about producers' girlfriends. In Peggy, Patricia and Beverly, Primus has a trio of clichés. Peggy is the pert and peroxided Madonna-wannabe, Patricia is a kooky, past-her-prime Debbie Reynolds type who likes "sad but funny films", while Beverly is the sharp-tongued, business-like black woman ("sassy" is no doubt the adjective the film-makers would use) who is fighting hard to find herself a decent part. The latter may make a fair point about the unfair film world, but it is one that *Mistress* is hardly committed to pursuing, while the importance of Beverly's role is further undercut by the industry in-joke that casts her opposite a tediously self-parodying De Niro (who is famed for only dating "sassy" black women). Sexual politics is not *Mistress'* concern, which is a shame since it is an all too patently rich theme for a Hollywood satire to flirt with.

Lizzie Francke

Red Rock West

USA 1992

Director: John Dahl

Certificate

15

Distributor

Rank

Production Company

Red Rock Films

Executive Producers

Michael Kuhn

Jane McCann

Executive in charge of Production

Tim Clawson

Producers

Sigurjon Sigvatsson

Steve Golin

Supervising Producer

Aron Warner

Associate Producers

Rick Dahl

Lynn Weimer

Production Co-ordinators

Larry Shapiro

Beth Depatie

Production Manager

Philip Rose

Location Managers

LA:

Kevin Halloran

Arizona:

Anne McCaffrey

Post-production Supervisors

Vincent Landay

Scott Carleton

Diana Seel

Casting

Carol Lewis

Assistant Directors

Mike Topoozian

Michael A. McCue

Scott T. Mislan

Screenplay

John Dahl

Rick Dahl

Director of Photography

Marc Reshovsky

Colour

DeLuxe

Additional Photography

Ron Schmidt

2nd Unit Photography

Beth-Jana Friedberg

Editor

Scott Chestnut

Production Designer

Robert Pearson

Art Directors

Don Diers

Additional:

Steven James Rice

Set Decorator

Kate Sullivan

Set Dressers

Don G. Smith

Warren Sewell

Dwain F. Wilson

Scenics

Craig A. Muzio

David Snow

Jaime M. Ortiz

Sculptures

Dean Gates

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Frank Ceglia

Special Effects

Mark Byers

Music

William Olvis

Music Supervisors

Evyen Kleen

Paul Broucek

Music Editors

Alex Gibson

Sherry Whitfield

Songs

"Alone in San Antone"

by Buddy Cannon, Luke

Reed, performed by Jeff

Chance; "Hey Porter",

"Folsom Prison Blues"

by John R. Cash,

performed by Johnny

Cash; "Crime of the

Century" by Richard

Fagan, Ralph Murphy,

performed by Shania

Twain; "Strangers

an Hour Ago" by John

Brannen, David Malloy,

Spady Brannan,

performed by John

Brannen; "Redneck

Girls" by and

performed by The

Kentucky Headhunters;

"Highway 29"

by W. Seth Russell,

performed by Billy

Bacon and The

Forbidden Pigs; "I Buy

Her Roses" by Roger

Brown, Glen Ray,

performed by Sammy

Kershaw; "Should Have

Been a Cowboy" by and

performed by Toby

Keith; "1,000 Miles

From Nowhere"

by and performed

by Dwight Yoakam

Costume Design

Terry Dresbach

Costume Supervisor

Lori Eskowitz

Make-up

Patty York

Special Make-up Effects

John Buechler

Title Design

Neal Thompson

Titles/Opticals

Cinema Research

Corporation

Sound Design

Jay Boekelheide

Supervising Sound Editor

Patrick Dodd

Sound Editor

Mark Weingarten

ADR Editor

Joan E. Chapman

Foley Editor

Malcolm Fife

Sound Recordists

Mark Deren

Music

Douglas Botnick

Robert Battaglia

Foley Recordists

Richard Duarte

Eric Thompson

Dolby stereo

consultant:

Steve F.B. Smith

Sound Re-recordists

Mark Berger

Samuel Lehmer

Sound Transfers

Sound Services

Sound Effects Editor

Samuel H. Hinckley

Foley Artists

Margie O'Malley

Jennifer Myers

Stunt Co-ordinator

Dan Bradley

Stunts

Rick Barrer

Cathy Browning

Keith Campbell

Charlie Carpenter

Scott Cook

Robert Detweiler

Dale Gibson

Geno Hart

Don Ruffin

Bob Wagner

Cast
Nicolas Cage
Michael Williams
Lara Flynn Boyle
Suzanne Brown
Dennis Hopper
Lyle
J. T. Walsh
Wayne Brown
Craig Reay
Jim
Vance Johnson
Mr Johnson
Robert Apel
Howard
Bobby Joe McFadden
Old Man
Dale Gibson
Kurt
Ted Parks
Cashier
Robert Guajardo
Doctor
Sarah Sullivan
Nurse
Timothy Carhart
Deputy Greytack
Dan Shor
Deputy Bowman

Michael Rudd
Red Rock Bartender
Dwight Yoakam
Truck Driver
Peter Kevin Quinn
Truck Driver's Buddy
Jeff Levine
Country Girl Bartender
Shawn Michael Ryan
Tai
Barbara Glover
Jane
Robert Beecher
Caretaker
Jody Carter
Caretaker's Wife
Babs Bram
Receptionist

8,853 feet
98 minutes

Penniless and 1200 miles from home after a job offer has fallen through, Michael pulls into Red Rock (pop. 8741). Mistaken by the bartender for 'Lyle' - but playing along at the mention of paid employment - he's handed a \$5,000 advance and details of the person he's meant to kill, the bartender's wife Suzanne. Michael immediately approaches his target and reveals her husband's intentions; she offers him twice the amount to kill her husband for her. Michael writes a note to the local sheriff detailing this family feud, then drives away, only to collide with a stranger whose truck has broken down. Taking the stranger to Red Rock's hospital, he fills out an accident report, looking for the first opportunity to get back on the road, but the sheriff arrives first, proving to be none other than Wayne the bartender; the doctor reveals that the run-over man had already been shot.

Wayne arrests Michael as the suspected killer, planning to dispose of him. Michael manages to evade him, but is almost run over by a fellow Texan, who offers him a ride; Michael is horrified to learn his name is Lyle. Coerced into joining him for a drink at Wayne's bar, Michael escapes through a window seconds before Wayne and Lyle come in search of him. Explaining the situation to Suzanne, Michael manages to knock Wayne out when he arrives at her house; Suzanne and Michael leave town, but stop off at a motel and toy with the idea of travelling to Mexico together. On Suzanne's suggestion, they return to town to pick up her money, which she claims is in Wayne's safe. In his office, they find the safe empty, but manage to hide just before Wayne returns; Wayne is then arrested by his own deputies, who have found a 'wanted' poster on the shot man's body, identifying Wayne and Suzanne as bank robbers. Lyle arrives to hear the story, and springs Wayne from jail. Wayne, Lyle, Michael and Suzanne drive to a cemetery where the bank loot is hidden. Tension between Lyle and Wayne over their 50/50 split of the money boils over, and both men are killed, leaving Michael and Suzanne to hop a passing freight ►

◀ train. When Michael tries to dump the money, Suzanne shoots at him with a now empty gun. He shoves her out of the train, and as police arrive, Michael – finding the last remaining wad of notes – continues on his way.

Two of the big commercial reasons for the current vogue for film noir are the scope the genre offers for cynical on-screen gesturing before the obligatory moral ending, and the carte blanche it provides for film-makers to assert style over theme. John Dahl's first feature *Kill Me Again* headed this way, but with Michael Madsen lending his best Mitchum-like menace, and a deceptively tricky plot, it still felt dangerous enough to be more than pastiche. His self-styled 'country noir' follow-up has bigger name actors and is much more convoluted; it's more of everything and in total quite a bit less. It's as if Dahl had looked back to his previous feature and, through a mist of praise, been influenced by his influences at second remove.

Michael, Suzanne and Wayne are archetypes grafted from the pages of James S. Cain – the innocent stranger and the corrupt couple, iconically signalled by Lara Flynn Boyle's 1940s stylings, from her brows to the cut of her jacket. But these allusions amount to mere translation of the films of the books, and the writing of Rick and John Dahl comes across like snippets of half-remembered plot lines, small parts of great wholes. This is collage culture, of a sort that Propaganda, the

production company, knows very well from its output of videos, from Madonna to Coca-Cola.

The actors are relegated to the status of moving props, the honourable exception being J.T. Walsh, who manages to use Wayne's caginess as a space in which to hint; but read against Dennis Hopper's drawling killer or Nicolas Cage's born victim, his performance has little chance other than to glimmer in the background. A possible redemption – to let the audience in on its game of influences and appropriations, to be knowing but playful – is roundly avoided because Dahl seems to believe that *Red Rock West* genuinely is an up-front thriller, that the plethora of coincidences are readable as fate rather than script repair. *Kill Me Again*, though structured around a similar 'ingenu/psycho/femme fatale' triumvirate, kept its despairing inevitability as a final shock. Here, it's more like a drawn-out scramble in search of an unhappy ending.

Set in Arizona (here doubling as Wyoming), both of Dahl's films to date show a sense of landscape – of broken-down towns, communities based on oil that dried up with the wells – which he sets great store by, but rarely lingers on. There's a feeling that if Dahl jettisoned MTV noir and went for the stories of these decaying shacks, then the promising director of *Kill Me Again* might get a second breath. Until then it looks as if it's going to be hit-and-miss ersatz pulp all the way.

Paul Tarrago

South Central

USA 1992

Director: Steve Anderson

Certificate

15

Distributor

Warner

Production Company

Central Productions

A Ixtlan production

In association with

Monument Pictures

and Enchantment

Films

Executive Producer

Oliver Stone

Co-executive Producers

Michael Spielberg

Brad Gilbert

Producers

Janet Yang

William B. Steakley

Co-producer

Steve Anderson

Line Producer

Lowell D. Blank

Production Associate

Conrad L. Ricketts

Production Co-ordinator

Christine M. Johnston

Unit Production Manager

Lowell D. Blank

Location Manager

Mark Zetler

Casting

Jaki Brown

Assistant Directors

Phillip Christon

Suzanne L. Haasis

Edward Kalpa

Screenplay

Steve Anderson

Based on the book *Crips*

by Donald Bakeer

Director of Photography

Charlie Lieberman

Colour

DeLuxe

Camera Operator

Scott E. Steele

Editor

Steve Nevius

Additional Editor

Michael Bloecher

Production Designers

David Brian Miller

Marina Kieser

Art Director

Andrew D. Brothers

Set Decorator

Caroline Stover

Set Dressers

Laurie Russman

James E. Georgopoulos

Ron Davis

Scenic

David Ultan

Special Effects

Paul Staples

Ron Trost

Music

Tim Truman

Executive Music Producer

Budd Carr

Music Editors

Dino Moriana

George Budd

Songs

"Bounce, Rock, Skate, Roll" by and performed

by Vaughan Mason;

"Rumors of a Dead

Man" by and

performed by Boo-Yaa

T.R.I.B.E.; "West Coast

Pop Lock" by

Troutman, Troutman,

Hooks, Hudson,

performed by Ronnie

Hudson; "Dis Tip",

"Nothin' But a Party"

by J. Reese, J. Scott,

L. Allen, L. Hawes,

A. Lowery, performed

by Vibe Squad; "Love

Lite", "Drink the Water"

by and performed by

Lester Abrams; "Ride"

by Fizz, M. Ciravolo,

R. Matchinga, D. Vegas,

performed by

Congregation; "The Groove Line" by Rod Temperton, performed by Heatwave; "Street Life" by Scarface, Bido, performed by Scarface; "Flirt" by Larry Blackmon, Tomi Jenkins, performed by Cameo; "2 Skanless" by C. Wilkerson, T. Alvarez, performed by Hi-C; "Sexual Healing" by Marvin Gaye, Odell Brown, David Ritz, performed by Marvin Gaye; "Check Out the Radio" by C. Ridenhour, K. Boxley, H. Boxley, A. Allan, performed by Spectrum City; "Thrill Me" by and performed by Gail Green; "Cutie Pie" by A. Hudson, D. Roberson, G. Green, J. Meadows, T. Morgan, G. Hudson, T. Dudley, performed by One Way; "Fantastic Voyage" by F. Alexander Jnr, F. Lewis, T. McCain, M. Craig, T. Shelby, S. Shockley, N. Beavers, O. Stokes, M.A. Wodd, performed by Lakeside; "Broke Off" by C. Wilkerson, performed by Hi-C; "Just a Touch of Love" by Mark Adams, Dan Webster, Mark Hicks, Raymond Turner, performed by Slave; "It's Alright" by Khiry Abdulsamad, Tajh Abdulsamad, Joe Wolf, performed by Classic Example

Choreography
Rana Mack

Costume Design
Mary Law Weir

Costume Supervisor
Leslie Brown

Make-up
Marci Anderson

Titles/Opticals
Pacific Title

Sound Recordists
Michael Florimbi
Larry Pitman

Music:
Brian Reeves
Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
Rick Ash
Dean Zupancic

Technical Consultant
Johnny Spain

Creative Consultant
Glenn Plummer

Stunt Co-ordinator
Julius LeFlore

Stunts
Scott Sudduth
Von L. Roddy

Cast

Glenn Plummer

Bobby

Byron Keith Minns

Ray Ray

Carl Lumbly

Ali

Lexie D. Bigham

Bear

Vincent Craig Dupree

Loco

LaRita Shelby

Carole

Kevin Best

Genie Lamp

"Big Daddy" Wayne

Henchman

Baldwin C. Sykes

Ken Dog

Rana Mack

Girl in Club

Diane Manzo

Undercover Cop

Sal Landi

Detective

Christian Coleman

Jimmie

Leonard Boyles

Termite

Terrence Williams

Boody

Reginald T. Dorsey

Bastille

Tim DeZarn

Buddha

Allen Michael Lerner

Broken Nose

Julius LeFlore

George Mulholland

Prison Guards

Ivory Ocean

Willie Manchester

Vickilyn Reynolds

Willie's Wife

Linda Fontanette

Neighbour

Richard G. Camphuis

Michael McNab

Policemen

Starletta Dupois

Nurse Shelly

Darren Leong

Kim

Lanier Edwards

Muslim

Clynn Jackson III

Intern

Donald Bakeer

Dr King

Bonnie Oda Homsey

Patty Chin

Mark E. Anderson

Sakett

Ron Chovance

Parole Officer

Eugene Williams

Local Tough

Musa Bakeer

Young Boy

Allan Hatcher

Alvin Hatcher

Baby Jimmie



She's a femme fatale: Lara Flynn Boyle



Parent 'Hood: Byron Keith Minns, Christian Coleman

Caught breaking into a car, Jimmie is shot and seriously injured by its owner, Willie Manchester. In prison, Bobby reacts to the news by distancing himself from the other Deuce inmates and falls under the influence of new cellmate Ali, a Muslim. Carole, visiting Jimmie, tells a nurse he has begun to follow his father and grandfather into prison, while Jimmie reveals to hospital staff that his mother abuses him. Ali tells Bobby he must shoulder some blame for his son's troubles. To make amends, he must secure parole and take hold of Jimmie.

Bobby wins parole and finds that Jimmie, now recovered, has been sent to a juvenile detention centre. Jimmie is contemptuous of his father's refusal to help him escape and take revenge on Willie Manchester. In the night, he escapes under his own steam. Bobby tracks him down to Ray Ray's HQ, where Ray blocks Bobby's appeals to his son. In a struggle, Bobby is overpowered; Manchester is brought before Jimmie, who aims a gun at him. Bobby himself manages to get hold of a gun, and persuades Jimmie not to fire; they embrace and leave the den.

● *South Central's* theme is a topical one: what happens to family and social life when fathers are absent or inadequate? Ali, seeking to enlighten Bobby, claims that black communities are collapsing because fathers, wrapped up in crime or locked up in prison, are not fit or able to guide their sons. Simplistic though it is, this is a view regularly heard in discussions about inner-city America, and which in recent cinema has been best treated by John Singleton's *Boyz n The Hood*.

Lacking the influence of a father, the film suggests, youths may turn to other forms of authority. In the tussle for control of Bobby's son Jimmie, gang leader Ray Ray insists that Jimmie has become his charge because now "Deuce is his daddy". This corruption of fatherly influence is more subtly caught earlier on when Ray induces Jimmie into stealing car radios, pre-

sending the crime as a rite of passage – an invitation Jimmie accepts with the eagerness of a son wanting to impress. Somewhat in opposition to Ray is Ali, a benign mentor to Bobby, who had also been brought up fatherless.

The agenda is always foremost in the viewer's mind – not surprisingly, as the artistry would have to be very sure to match the certainties of the message. In fact, the plot is schematic, the characters verge on types, and there are just too many 'key' scenes from which lessons are to be taken – traits not unknown in the films of executive producer Oliver Stone (*South Central* was supported by Stone's production company Ixtlan, which backs small-budget work by newcomers). Still, while director Steve Anderson, a feature debutant, displays little of Stone's compensatory bravura or compelling rhetoric, the film is nonetheless well paced and well played.

Formally, it has modest ambitions. The narrative divides quite markedly into three stages: problem depicted, solution found and solution executed. There is, though, one jarring item to this uncomplicated agenda. The revelation that the mother Carole sexually abuses Jimmie is the final, shocking card in a deck stacked against her. In the context of a film which aspires to reflect a present-day reality, the mother's abuse of her son asks to be read similarly to the son's running wild – as a predictable consequence of a home that lacks a decent man.

A generous view would be to interpret this as nothing more sinister than thoughtlessness, tying it into the film's increasingly narrow focus on Bobby's fight to reclaim his son. *South Central*, which starts off with the sparky urban realism now expected of the ghetto-gangster film, might be seen as an exemplary illustration of the pull of melodrama, as any problematic, particular reality is carried away in melodrama's great general swell. And there really is no swell greater than that produced by the old father-son thing.

Robert Yates

Sure Fire

USA 1990

Director: Jon Jost

Certificate

Not yet issued

Distributor

BFI

Production Company

Complex Productions

Producer

Henry S. Rosenthal

Associate Producer

Carola B. Anderson

Additional Dialogue

Tom Blair

Kristi Hager

Robert Ernst

Kate Dezina

Director of Photography

Jon Jost

Colour

TVC

Additional Photography

Swain Wolfe

Editor

Jon Jost

Music

Erling Wold

Main Title Theme:

Jon A. English

Music Performed by

Erling Wold

Pedal Steel Guitar:

Peter Siegel

Sound Design

Anthony J. Gnazzo

Walter P. O'Connor

Sound Recordist

Alenka Sunday Pavlin

Sound Re-Recordist

Phill Sawyer

Foley Recordist

Mark Anderson

Cast

Tom Blair

Wes

Kristi Hager

Bobbi

Robert Ernst

Larry

Kate Dezina

Ellen

Phillip R. Brown

Phillip

Dennis R. Brown

Dennis

Rick Blackwell

Dick

Robert Nalwalker

Sheriff

Haley Westwood

Haley

Kaye Evans

Kaye

Henry M. Blackwell

J.T. Reynolds

Thomas D.A. Smith

John Betenson

Cowboys

7,470 feet

83 minutes

● Circleville, Utah. In a cafe, Wes and his friend Larry talk about a local woman, Sandra Jean, who has disappeared. Wes asks Larry to pick up a rifle for him in the neighbouring town. As Wes is about to leave, the sheriff takes a phone call: Sandra Jean's body has been found. Wes calls on Dick Blackwell, a banker, to get backing for a property scheme, and tells him to transfer funds from Wes's own account to cover interest payments due on Larry's overdraft.

Wes's wife Bobbi visits Larry's wife Ellen, who is missing her daughter, away at college. Bobbi relates a distressing dream about a bird caught on barbed wire. When Larry gets home, the news that Wes has paid the interest causes a row between Larry and Ellen. Wes arrives home, shows his son

Phillip how to trampoline, and gives Bobbi elaborate instructions on various tasks. She reacts coldly.

On the way to a deer hunt, Wes patronisingly offers Larry a job, which he turns down. At the camp, in front of Larry and another friend, Dennis, Wes presents Phillip with his first rifle and delivers a long lecture on how to use it. Later, alone with Phillip, Wes attempts a man-to-man talk about sex. Phillip reveals Bobbi is planning to leave for California, adding that if she does he will go with her. Wes is furious.

The hunting party splits into pairs, and Wes accompanies Phillip. In the woods, Larry and Dennis hear two distant shots, and come upon Wes and Phillip dead, apparently both shot by Wes. With Larry and Ellen, the sheriff goes to break the news to Bobbi.

● It is 14 years since the last UK release of a Jon Jost fiction feature. That film, *Last Chants for a Slow Dance*, also had Tom Blair playing a rampant egomaniac who ends up committing an act of senseless violence. But where Tom Bates in the earlier film was aggressively nihilistic, an unrepentant destroyer, the Wes of *Sure Fire* is a more ambivalent, even pitiable, figure. Far better integrated into his community than Bates, from one angle he could even be seen as an ideal citizen – supportive husband, solicitous father, generous friend and keen entrepreneur. Which is clearly how he wants to see himself.

It's his desperate need to have everyone else go along with this self-image that turns Wes into a monster of control, unable to relax his grip on those around him. At one point we see him pumping bullets into a target, each time hitting closer to the centre, exercising over his gun the kind of mastery he longs to exercise over people. Soon afterwards, telling his wife Bobbi how to handle a young man working for them, he lays down a long, manically detailed scenario of what she should say and do, right down to the exact words, gestures and tone of voice. Conventional film grammar would punctuate such a monologue with occasional cutaway shots of Bobbi; Jost instead holds steadily on Wes, tracking slowly in, giving us no clue how his ►



Backwoods bonding: Robert Ernst, Tom Blair, Phillip R. Brown

◀ wife's reacting or even if she's still in the room. Only at the very end of the spiel do we see her exasperated glare, as her "Are you done, Wes?" comes with the force of a slap.

Here as elsewhere the film's pared-down economy (not just financial, though that too) serves to clinch the impact of the scene. Jost can do more with less than almost any other filmmaker around, and there are passages in *Sure Fire* whose austerity would make Bresson look fidgety. The camera moves very little, often not at all, yet there's no feeling of stasis – rather of poised stillness, an unwavering gaze that takes in, and enhances, the emotional intensity of the action.

Naturalism has never been Jost's aim, but his stylised, even minimalist technique can create an exceptionally rich sense of place. *Sure Fire* was shot entirely on location, using only four professional players (the rest of the cast were local people) and allowing the story to develop out of "the opportunities at hand". The stern, beautiful landscape of Utah becomes as much a character as any of the actors, and Jost uses it to enlarge and comment on what happens. In the final scene, rather than follow the sheriff into Bobbi's house – since we can predict just what he's likely to say – the camera leaves him on the porch and rises to execute a slow 360° pan around the treetops and the distant mountains. As it circles, blood-red letters appear along the bottom of the screen: the last of three quotes from the Book of Mormon that punctuate the film.

Jost has long since sloughed off the Godardian didacticism that encumbered early works like *Angel City*, and these Mormon texts hardly feel like the film's "message". Instead the effect of their lapidary certainties ("The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated"), set against the stark outlines of trees and mountains, is of a meditation on the landscape and all the national myths tied up with it – Manifest Destiny, the frontier, go-getting, men in a man's world, and so on – that could give rise to someone like Wes.

Sure Fire is dedicated to Jost's father, a professional soldier, and the film is partly "a kind of self-therapeutic, highly metaphoric working out of a bad relationship with my father" which no doubt accounts for its insight into the pathos in Wes, the loneliness behind his non-stop bluster. But Wes also stands for something Jost hates and vehemently opposes in his filmmaking career: "the American Way [that] has no place or time for smallness, because it is all too desperately busy trying to mask its emptiness with bombast." In a *Film Comment* article last year, Jost likened Hollywood movies to the fleshy magnitudes of Rubens, and his own determinedly small-scale work to the quiet subtlety of Vermeer. The comparison might sound pretentious; but it's one that the richness and poetic complexity of *Sure Fire* go a long way towards justifying.

Philip Kemp

Swing Kids

USA 1993

Director: Thomas Carter

Certificate

12

Distributor

Buena Vista

Production Company

Hollywood Pictures

Executive Producers

Frank Marshall
Christopher Meledandri

Producers

Mark Gordon
John Bard Manulis

Co-producer

Harry Benn

Production Supervisor

Jan Balzer

Production Co-ordinators

Gail Samuelson
London:

Val Demeter

Production Manager

Oldrich Mach

Unit Production Manager

Tom Sachs

Location Managers

Czechoslovakia:

Ivo Pavelek

Zdenek Fiala

Castings

Deborah Aquila

UK:

Noel Davis

Jeremy Zimmerman

Czechoslovakia:

Eva Kadankova

Assistant Directors

David Householter
Marcia Gay

Laura Rice

Krystof Hanzlik

Screenplay

Jonathan Marc

Feldman

Director of Photography

Jerzy Zielinski

Colour

Technicolor

Camera Operators

Martin Hume

2nd Unit:

Tony Spratling

Steadicam Operator

Nigel Kirton

Editor

Michael R. Miller

Production Designer

Allan Cameron

Art Directors

Steve Spence

Tony Reading

Czechoslovakia:

Michal Krska

Set Decorator

Ros Shingleton

Storyboard Artist

Michael White

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Garth Inns

Music/Music Director

James Horner

Music Extracts

"Overture: Tristan and Isolde" by Richard Wagner; "Piano Trio in B flat major Op.97 'Archduke'" by Ludwig von Beethoven, performed by Alfred Cortot, Jacques Thibaud, Pablo Casals

Swing Arrangements

Chris Boardman

Orchestrations

Joel Rosenbaum

Executive Music Producer

Jonathan Marc

Feldman

Supervising Music Editors

Eric Reasoner

Jim Henrikson

Music Editor

Joe E. Rand

Swing Consultant

Leonard Feather

Songs

"Life Goes to a Party"

by Harry James, Benny Goodman; "Jumpin' at the Woodside", "Shout and Feel It" by Count Basie; "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" by Duke Ellington, Irving Mills, performed by Billy Banks; "Polka Parade" by Chris Boardman; "Tain't What You Do (It's the Way That Cha Do It)" by Sy Oliver, James Young; performed by Jimmie Lunceford and His Orchestra; "You Go to My Head" by J. Fred Coots, Haven Gillespie; "Harlem" by Eddie Carroll, performed by Teddy Foster; "Bugle Call Rag" by Billy Meyers, John Pettis, Elmer Schoebel, performed by Benny Goodman; "Zum Volkfest" by P. Larare; "Militärmarsch" by G. Trede; "Flat Foot Floogie" by Slim Gaillard, Bud Green, Slam Stewart, performed by Benny Goodman; "Swingtime in the Rockies" by James Mundy, Benny Goodman, performed by Benny Goodman; "Daphne (Manoir de mes rêves) by Django Reinhardt; "Sing, Sing (With a Swing)" by Louis Prima; "Bei Mir Bist Du Schön (Means That You're Grand)" by Sammy Cahn, Saul Chaplin, Jacob Jacobs, Sholom Secunda, performed by Janis Siegel; "Goodnight, My Love" by Mack Gordon, Harry Revel, performed by Benny Goodman

Choreography
Otis Sallid

Costume Design
Jenny Beavan

Costume Supervisor
Janet Tebrooke

Make-up
Paul Engelen

Czechoslovakia:
Ales Kocian

Title Design
Burke Mattsson

Titles/Opticals
Buena Vista Optical

Supervising Sound Editor
George Watters II

Sound Editors
F. Hudson Miller
R.J. Palmer
Suhail Kaftiy
Howell Gibbins
Midge Costin

Supervising ADR Editor
R.J. Kizer

ADR Editor
Denise Whiting-Gontz

Foley Editors
Victoria Martin
Matt Harrison

Sound Recordists
Ivan Sharrock
Music:
Shawn Murphy

ADR Recordist
Doc Kane

Foley Recordist
David Gertz

Dolby stereo

Sound Re-recordists
John Reitz
David Campbell
Gregg Rudloff

Technical Adviser

Hans Massaquoi

German Military Advisers

Czechoslovakia:

Miroslav Mudra

United Kingdom:

Philip Baker

Stunt Co-ordinator

Mark Boyle

Stunts

Gerry Crampton

Yirka Kraus

David Cronnelly

Mark Southworth

Paul Jennings

Eddie Stacey

Cast

Robert Sean Leonard

Peter Müller

Christian Bale

Thomas Berger

Frank Whaley

Arvid

Barbara Hershey

Frau Müller

Kenneth Branagh

Herr Knoepp

Tushka Bergen

Evey

David Tom

Willi

Julia Stemberger

Frau Linde

Jayce Bartok

Otto

Noah Wyle

Emil

Johan Leysen

Herr Schumler

Douglas Roberts

Hinz

Martin Clunes

Bannführer

Jessica Stevenson

Helga

Carl Brincat

HY Thug

Mary Fogarty

Mama Klara

Karel Belohradsky

Bismarck Owner

Peter Baikie

Bismarck Bandleader

Jennifer Chamberlain

Swing Girl with

Thomas

Lucie Vackarova

Swing Girl with Peter

Katerina Dankova

Magdalena Chrzova

Evey's School Friends

Jiri Malek

Jewish Boy

Metin Yenal

Customer in Bookshop

Arthur White

Alberti

Marek Libert

Whistling HY

Nada Konvalinkova

Pastry Shop Woman

Petr Jaki

Policeman in

Marketplace

David Robb

Dr Berger

Ciaran Madden

Frau Berger

John Streilburger

Dr Keppler

Hana Cizkova

Frau Keppler

Petr Lepsa

Café Trichter Owner

Warnar Van Eeden

Trichter Bandleader

Andrew Kitchen

Gestapo at Trichter

Jeremy Bulloch

Small Club Owner

Joseph Bennett

Roman Janousek

Luftwaffe Pilots

Richard Hanson

HY Fink

Sean Pertwee

Gestapo Arresting

Berger

Sarka Horcikova

Berger's Maid

Jochen Horst

Speaker at

Hitler Youth Rally

Vladimir Matejcek

Funeral Pastor

John Duval

Gestapo with Ashes

Marie Vorlova

Kate Buffery

Women with Ashes

Eliza Clark

Girl with Ashes

Sabine Skala

Café Bismarck Singer

Billy Burke

Sven Daum

Gregory Garrison

Ulf Garrizmann

Ideal Getinkaya

Ines Goritz

Bettina Heyroth

Dita Kalibova

Dana Kopacova

Britta Krause

Ivan Landa

Tomas Mesner

Anna Montanaro

Cathy Murdoch

Vaclav Muska

Melinda O'Connor

Julie Oram

Tessa Pattani

Lenka Pesatova

Simon Shelton

Tini Stoll

Pavel Svoboda

Freya Tampert

Klara Vojvodova

10,239 feet

114 minutes

● Hamburg, 1993. Peter Müller, teenage son of a violinist who died after being imprisoned for his anti-Nazi views, is a 'swing kid', addicted to officially disapproved American music. Peter and his best friend Thomas Berger impulsively steal a radio from a Nazi official, knowing it has been stolen from an arrestee and intending to give it to their crippled guitarist friend Arvid. Peter is caught and, thanks to the intervention of Knoepp, an SS man who is courting his mother, gets off lightly, but is forced to join the Hitler Youth. Thomas also joins, claiming he can be HY by day and swing kid by night. Emil, a former swing kid, now a committed Nazi, assaults Arvid. Thomas boxes with him to avenge his friend, but the upshot of the fight is that Emil respects Thomas and Thomas is seduced by the possibilities of being a Nazi.

Knoepp warns Peter that his part-

time job with a bookseller might not be politically expedient; Peter learns that Herr Schumler, his boss, supplies forged papers to dissidents. At a successful gig, Arvid refuses to play a song requested by Luftwaffe men, and then goes home to commit suicide. Peter is ordered to deliver boxes to several citizens and, acting on advice Knoepp has given him, opens a box to discover the ashes of a political criminal. The HY break up a swing party and Thomas personally beats up Peter. As the party-goers are dragged off to camps, Knoepp stands by lamenting the waste of Peter's potential, but Thomas – shocked by his own brutality – and Willi, Peter's younger brother, salute him with a cry of "Swing Heil".

● An odd footnote to history makes an even odder movie. Its well-intentioned recreation of the period is rendered surreal by the use of mainly English-speaking American actors pretending to be Germans who pepper their language with Anglo-American slang and dress like bizarre combinations of Cab Calloway and Anthony Eden. *Swing Kids* is doomed to bomb at the box office. Regardless of quality (it is surprisingly effective in parts), this is a youth movie with a Nazi background and music guaranteed not to appeal to rap-happy audiences.

"No one who likes swing can become a Nazi," claims Thomas, heavily signalling that he will disprove this thesis. The unsubtle transformation of Christian Bale from jiving anarchist into heiling militarist is surprisingly potent, perhaps because it forces us to notice how easily these second- or third-generation brat packers conform to an Aryan ideal. The analysis of the seductive side of fascism, as represented by an unbilled Kenneth Branagh's persuasive Gestapo officer, is rather more rigorous than might have been expected. Especially neat is the moment when Peter follows his advice to consider the political ramifications of every action and is confronted with the brutality Knoepp conceals.

The film plays lip service to the Jewish and black composers and performers of swing music, but its juxtaposition of wild dances with regimented rallies suggests that the Nazis were more offended by the swing kids' hedonist abandon than by the music's suspect ethnicity. However, it is wishful thinking to present as rebels a group of teenagers whose fashion statements are mindlessly pro-American. Credibility truly snaps in the finale, as the cramped neatness of a city-wide plot in which old friends are always bumping into and beating up one another is emphasised by the vaguely character-changing collision of Peter, Thomas and Willi and the bathetic repetition of their vaguely chilling war cry, "Swing Heil". And surely, the most committed German swing musician of 1939 would have to be suicidal to play "Bei Mir Bist du Schön", a big band number in Yiddish.

Kim Newman

3 Ninja Kids

USA 1992

Director: Jon Turteltaub

Certificate

PG
Distributor
 Buena Vista
Production Company
 Global Film Enterprises
Executive Producer
 Shunji Hirano
Co-executive Producer
 James Kang
Producer
 Martha Chang
Co-producers
 Hiroshi Kusu
 Akio Shimizu
Line Producer
 Susan Stremple
Associate Producer
 Richard Park
Production Associate
 Dawn Carroll
Production Co-ordinator
 Cheryl Miller
Production Manager
 Susan Stremple
Location Manager
 Paul Brinkman
Unit Co-ordinator
 Tasen Chou
2nd Unit Director
 Charlie Kao
Casting
 Kim Williams
Assistant Directors
 J.B. Rogers
 Scott Harris
 Alexander Guzman
 Carla Bowen
Screenplay
 Edward Emanuel
Story
 Kenny Kim
Director of Photography
 Richard Michalak
Colour
 Technicolor
Additional Photography
 Chris Faloona
Steadicam Operator
 Kirk R. Gardner
Editor
 David Rennie
Production Designer
 Kirk Petrucci
Art Directors
 Ken Kirchner
 Greg Grande
Set Decorator
 Carol Pressman
Set Dresser
 Tom Waisanen
Special Effects
 Robert E. McCarthy
Co-ordinator
 Wizard Inc
Music/Music Performed by
 Rick Marvin
Orchestrations
 Rick Marvin
 Scott Smalley
 Ken Thorne
Music Editor
 Douglas Lackey
Song
 "Kid Power" by Rick Marvin, William Griffin, performed by Will Roc
Costume Design
 Mona May
Wardrobe Supervisor
 Nicky Bradshaw
Make-up
 Angela Margolis
 Swing:
 Tacy Worrall
Titles
 Title House
Supervising Sound Editor
 Wayne Nakatsu
Sound Editors
 Fred Judkins
 Dialogue:
 Steve Kageyama
Sound Recordists
 Bill Robbins
 Larry Pitman

Music:

Rick Marvin
ADR/Foley Recordist
 Bruce Honda
 Dolby stereo
Sound Re-recordists
 Mark Rozett
 David Yamamoto
 Rick Ash
 Dean A. Zupancic
Sound Effects Editors
 Darleen Stoker
 Bruce Honda
Foley Artists
 Laura Macias
 Paige Pollack
 Sharon Michaels
Project Consultant
 Tom Taylor
Stunt Co-ordinators
 Rick Avery
 Monty Cox
Stunts
 Peter Antico
 Brian Avery
 Mikey Avery
 Rick Avery
 John Branagan
 Kurt Bryant
 Jeff Cadiante
 Danny Castle
 Doc Charbonneau
 Lamont Cox
 Richard Epper
 Dane Farwell
 Gregory Gault
 Al Goto
 Keii Johnston
 Myung Kim
 Randy Lamb
 Eric Lee
 Warren McGee
 Denny Pierce
 Patrick Romano
 Birgit Schier
 Erik Stabenau
 Philip Tan
 Jack West

Cast

Victor Wong
 Grandpa Mori
Michael Treanor
 Sam "Rocky" Douglas
Max Elliott Slade
 Geoffrey "Colt" Douglas
Chad Power
 Michael "Tum Tum" Douglas
Rand Kingsley
 Hugo Snyder
Alan McRae
 Sam Douglas
Margarita Franco
 Jessica Douglas
Kate Sargeant
 Emily
Joel Swetow
 Brown
Toru Tanaka
 Rushmore
Patrick Labyorteaux
 Fester
Race Nelson
 Marcus
D.J. Harder
 Hammer
Baha Jackson
 Scott Caudill
 Bullies
Fritzi Burr
 Babysitter
Tasen Chou
 Store Owner
Clifton Powell
 FBI Agent Kurl
Al Septien
 FBI Agent Green

7,576 feet
 84 minutes

Original running time
 85 minutes

Three young brothers, Sam, Geoffrey and Michael Douglas, spend their vacation with their Japanese grandfather Mori, a Ninja master, learning the art of combat and self-defence. Grandpa assigns them new names, Rocky, Colt and Tum Tum respectively, to signify their identity as true Ninjas. Meanwhile, their father Sam, an FBI agent, vainly attempts to capture arms dealer Hugo Snyder, who is a former protégé and partner of Grandpa's. The boys return home, where they try to interest their father in their adventures and their new names, but he is too preoccupied to listen. Snyder hires three inept surfer villains to kidnap the brothers. After a couple of abortive attempts to capture the boys, the kidnappers infiltrate the family home while the parents are away. However, Rocky, Colt and Tum Tum, using a combination of Ninja skills, household objects and laxative-laced cola, triumph over their would-be kidnappers.

None the less, Snyder arrives with a more adept crew in time to abduct the boys, taking them to a secret hideout aboard an abandoned warship. Rocky's girlfriend from next door, Emily, conveys a message to Grandpa explaining where the boys have gone. Aboard the ship, the boys manage to fight off a host of Snyder's Ninja-trained soldiers while attempting to escape. Grandpa arrives in time to help them out. Snyder challenges Grandpa to a one-on-one fight to decide the ultimate victor, which Grandpa wins according to the rules of fair play. Snyder, a bad loser, attempts to shoot Grandpa when his back is turned, but Douglas and the FBI arrive just in time to ambush him. At last, the whole family is reconciled. Douglas praises his sons and his father-in-law, accepts the boys' new names and pledges to spend more time with his family.

3 *Ninja Kids*, already a big hit in the States, promises to be gobbled up at the box-office here like easily digested, attractively packaged fast-food. Even the title, dispensing with any definite article and assertively

numeric, has, like 'Big Mac', the sort of monosyllabic translatability that always travels well.

Children, especially boys between the ages of seven and 13, will love it. For members of that age and gender group, 3 *Ninja Kids* allows the vicarious expression of fantasies of control and empowerment. Several cracking good fight scenes imply that skill and teamwork are ultimately more important than size. The cheerful violence is the sticky icing on what is a morally conservative cake. As with most children's films, the family and good citizenship are shown to be centrally important. When Grandpa has his young disciples recite the Ninja code of honour, it sounds like a revamped version of the boy scout pledge - "A Ninja is truthful, loyal, a friend to those smaller than himself..."

Although distributed by Buena Vista International, a branch of the Disney company, 3 *Ninja Kids* was made by the tellingly named Global Film Enterprises. While the director and screenwriter are Caucasian, the original story writer and most of its producers are of Asian origin, with the result that a multi-cultural atmosphere pervades the film. The child actors may look as American as vanilla milkshakes, but there is a fair sprinkling of different races among both bad and good guys, and the dominant tone is that of a Hong Kong martial arts movie. Giving the 'kids' a Japanese grandfather is not merely expedient to the plot, but an opportunity to emphasise pride in mixed ethnicity. This seems a laudable shift of attitude, especially given Hollywood's ambivalent treatment of the Far East in recent films such as *Empire of the Sun*, *Black Rain* and the forthcoming adaptation of the Japan-bashing bestseller *Rising Sun* (tempered in pre-production to avert offence to Japanese finance). While these adult movies are choking on the bitter pill of world economics, 3 *Ninja Kids* offers its audience something as palliative as green tea ice cream, a meritocratic message that comforts one with the thought that Ninja sees no colour.

Leslie Felperin Sharman



Pre-teen ninja tyros: Michael Treanor, Chad Power, Max Elliott Slade

The Trial

United Kingdom 1992

Director: David Jones

Certificate

12
Distributor
 Feature Film Company
Production Companies
 BBC Films/Europanda
 Entertainment
Executive Producers
 Kobi Jaeger
 Reniero Compostella
 Mark Shivas
Producer
 Louis Marks
Associate Producers
 Carolyn Montagu
 Ann Wingate
Production Executive
 Geoffrey Paget
Production Supervisor
 Jan Balzer
Production Managers
 Vaclav Eisenhamer
 Prague:
 Martin Kuk
Unit Managers
 Kate Power
 Prague:
 Lubos Cizek
Casting
 Leo Davis
 USA:
 John Lyons
Assistant Directors
 Jake Wright
 PJ Simpson
 Prague:
 Jiri Ostry
 Jan Mensik
Screenplay
 Harold Pinter
 Based on the novel
 by Franz Kafka
Director of Photography
 Phil Meheux
 In colour
Steadicam Operator
 Andy Shuttleworth
Editor
 John Stothart
Production Designer
 Don Taylor
Art Directors
 Jim Holloway
 Prague:
 Jiri Matolin
Set Dresser
 John Bush
Music
 Carl Davis
Costume Design
 Anushia Nieradzick
Make-up
 Deanne Turner
 Prague:
 Zdenek Klika
Sound Editors
 Helen Whitehead
 Catherine Hodgson
Sound Recordist
 Jim Greenhorn

Cast

Kyle MacLachlan
 Josef K
Anthony Hopkins
 Priest
Jason Robards
 Dr Huld
Juliet Stevenson
 Fraulein Bürstner

Polly Walker

Leni
Alfred Molina
 Titorelli
Michael Kitchen
 Block
David Thewlis
 Franz
Tony Haygarth
 Willem
Douglas Hodge
 Inspector
Jiri Schwartz
 Babensteiner
David Schneider
 Kullich
Ondrej Vetchy
 Kamminer
Valerie Kaplanova
 Old Woman
Jiri Ded
 Old Man
Jiri Vavricek
 Red Beard
Paul Brooke
 Deputy Bank Manager
Harry Burton
 K's Assistant
Roger Lloyd Pack
 Leon Lissek
 Stairmen
Catherine Neilson
 Washer Woman
Trevor Peacock
 Examining Magistrate
Vaclav Jakoubek
 Small Boy
Patrick Godfrey
 Court Usher
Andrew Tiernan
 Berthold
Jiri Schmitzer
 Thin Defendant
Don Henderson
 Flogger
Martin Faltyn
 Clerk
Robert Lang
 K's Uncle
Jan Laibl
 Chief Clerk of the Court
Lynda Rybova
 Sabina Remundova
Lucie Bartonova
 Klara Jandova
Sarka Gerzova
 Nicole Gavalasova
Julie Harrerova
 Titorelli's Girls
John Woodvine
 Herr Deimen
Reniero Compostella
 Signor Rossi
Lena Birkova
 Bookstall Woman
Oskar Hak
 Verger
Karel Augusta
 Petr Drozda
 Executioners
Vladimir Tausinger
 Policeman
Petr Skarke
 Man in the Window

10,840 feet
 120 minutes

Prague 1912. Josef K, a senior bank clerk, rises from his bed to be placed under arrest by two officers. Representatives of an unknowable Law, they immediately release him to carry on with his everyday life. A week later, Josef receives a phone call summoning him to a preliminary hearing. Finding the courtroom with some difficulty, he harangues the Examining Magistrate and the system he represents, but ►

◀ his diatribe is interrupted by the court usher's wife making love with a student at the back of the hall. Josef leaves, and returns the following Sunday, but the court is not in session; the usher's wife seductively offers to aid him, but the student appears and carries her away. Josef then meets the usher, who bemoans his servile status. He shows Josef around the court offices where the sight of fellow defendants provokes an angry outburst, then a numbing attack of panic. Back at work he discovers the two officers who arrested him being whipped in a stationery cupboard. He pleads for their punishment to stop, but is then gripped by horror and flees.

Josef's Uncle Max turns up, having heard of his nephew's plight, and takes him to visit his old friend Huld, an advocate. While Huld talks with Max, Josef is lured out of the room by Leni, Huld's servant and possibly his mistress. Josef and Leni make love, and she advises him to visit Titorelli, a painter who specialises in portraits of judges. Titorelli explains the vagaries of pleas but offers no real solution, before being mobbed by a bevy of teenage girls. Returning to Huld with the intention of dispensing with his services, Josef meets Block, whose case has been underway for five years. Huld puts on a show of humiliating him before Josef as evidence of his ability to break spirits, but Josef rejects Huld nevertheless.

Back at work, Josef is asked to show an important client around the local cathedral, but when he arrives early the court chaplain is there. The chaplain tells Josef a parable to illustrate the defendant's position with regard to the Law. Josef sees the hopelessness of his situation and is panic-stricken. Collected from his room later that night by two new officers, he is led to a quarry where he lies down on a block of stone. The officers pass a knife back and forth above him, before one of them plunges it into his exposed chest. Gasping the words, "Like a dog," Josef expires.

● Orson Welles's decision to adapt Kafka's *The Trial* for film was apparently based on a list of literary 'classics' in the public domain presented to him by producer Alexander Salkind; he selected rather than chose. He then went on to lose his budget midway through production, along with his locations, and invoked critical bile through an expressionistic impro style rejigged around Paris's derelict Gare D'Orsay.

Thirty years later comes David Jones's version, with a screenplay by Harold Pinter, a project nurtured for over a decade, richly funded and shot in Czech locations. It carries all the trappings of a prestige production – famous faces and lush colour cinematography – and so, comparisons with Welles are largely inappropriate, if inevitable. This *Trial* is faithful and reverential, literal and literary, a cinematic approximation to the book, rather than a version of it. Originally commissioned by the BBC, it retains



Nouvelle Prague: Kyle MacLachlan

the feel of a television costume drama in its obsession with detail and authenticity, of dress, of sets, of respect for the original text. The formality of 1912 Prague takes on a sheen of period quaintness, the mundanity of Josef's everyday world becoming a living museum exhibit.

Complicit with this is the casting of cameo roles. Jason Robards, Anthony Hopkins and Juliet Stevenson crop up as markers of pedigree, but they work against Josef K's descent into an ever more opaque and nightmarishly anonymous Law, in that they're too recognisable, and within that recognition is a distracting aspect of reassurance. You are lost but there is suddenly something to place. And as the film is structured mostly around two-character scenes, the sequential unfolding of the narrative is undercut by the ever present question, "who's next?". It seems churlish to fault such a well-intentioned, technically formidable production – Carl Davis's score has a rousingly bombastic feel to it and most of the acting is top notch (Michael Kitchen's Block is a particular gem). But the film also displays a homogenising 'great works' aesthetic that's as readily transposed onto Dickens, Forster and Conan Doyle. Perhaps when it is screened on TV, with audience expectation already geared towards the viewing context, there won't be this sense of underachievement by overshooting the mark. But compare it with *Hunger*, Henning Carlsen's 1966 version of the Knut Hamsun novel. There, the protagonist's apartness is signalled by the use of an extremely narrow depth of field, and by the sparseness of sound; the mechanics of film throw him into relief. David Jones' floods of light and foregrounded baroque architecture have the reverse effect: stretched across the big screen, they draw things together, ornamentally unite them.

It's an effective film, though, if not a particularly affecting evocation of the original. There's the pleasure of luxury, of the staging and acting, and the intrigue of Kyle MacLachlan's lisping English-accented Josef. But as the dagger finally glistens above his chest with a chiaroscuro sheen, you can't help thinking that it's displeasure that's needed, and sordidness too.

Paul Tarrago

Vacas (Cows)

Spain 1992

Director: Julio Medem

Certificate

Not yet issued

Distributor

ICA

Production Company

Sogetel

In association with the Institute of Cinematography & Audiovisual Arts of the Spanish Ministry of Culture/The Cultural Department of the Basque Government

Executive Producers

José Luis Olaizola
Fernando de Garcillán

Production Director

Ricardo García Arrojos

Assistant Directors

Carlos Llorente Rivas
José Miguel Aguiló
Cristina Somalo

Screenplay

Julio Medem
Michel Gaztambide
Based on an original story by Julio Medem

Director of Photography

Carlos Gusi
In colour

Editor

Maria Elena Sainz de Rozas

Special Effects

Reyes Abades

Music

Alberto Iglesias

Wardrobe

Maria José Iglesias

Make-up

Goyo Menoiri

Sound Recorder

Julio Recuero

Technical Co-ordinator

Javier Arsuaga

Cast

Emma Suárez
Cristina
Carmelo Gómez
Manuel/Ignacio/Peru
Ana Torrent
Catalina
Karra Elejalde
Ilegorri/Lucas
Klara Badiola
Madalen
Txema Blasco
Manuel
Kándito Uranga
Carmelo/Juan
Pilar Barden
Paulina
Miguel Angel García
Peru as a child
Ane Sánchez
Cristina as a child
Magdalena Mikolajczyk
Daughter
Enara Azkue
Daughter as a child
Ortiz Balda
Ilegorri as a child/
Lucas as a child
Elisabeth Ruiz
Daughter (old)
Ramón Barea
Juez
Aitor Mazo
Xavier Aldanondo
Soldiers
Carlos Zabala
Official
Antxon Echeverria
Alberto Arizaga
Niko Lizeaga
Carlist Soldiers
Patri Santamaría
José Ramón Soroz
Journalists

8,640 feet

96 minutes

Subtitles

● Four interrelated stories, set in the Basque Country in Spain, centre on the Irigibel and Mendiluze families. 'The Coward Aizkolari': 1875. In the trenches during the Second Carlist War, under enemy attack, Carmelo Mendiluze attempts to steady the nerves of Manuel Irigibel, his neighbour and a local hero as an *aizkolari*, a practitioner of the 'sport of the axe'. Helping Irigibel, Mendiluze is shot dead and as he lies dying, Irigibel smears blood from Mendiluze's wound on himself, thus feigning death. He keeps up the pretence even when his leg is run over and shattered by the cart that disposes of the dead bodies; crawling away later, he encounters a cow, and stares into its eyes. 'The Axes': 1905. Manuel Irigibel, now old and still lame, is home in the Guipuzcoan Valley, where he lives with his son Ignacio and Ignacio's wife and daughters. He spends his time painting cows and appears to be deranged, although his young granddaughter, the six-year old Cristina, seems to understand him. His son Ignacio and neighbour Juan – the son of Carmelo Mendiluze – are great rivals in the sport of the axe, part of a family rivalry born of old Manuel's cowardice in the war. A log-chopping match is organised, which Ignacio wins, the start of a successful career.

From one victory, he returns home with the prize of a cow, named Pupille by old Manuel. Juan's hatred of his rival is compounded by the love affair between Ignacio and his sister, Catalina Mendiluze.

'The Lit Hole': 1915. Peru, the illegitimate son of Catalina and Ignacio, now ten, lives with his mother and unmarried uncle, Juan, but is welcome at the Irigibels'. There, he and the now 16-year-old Cristina – their friendship hinting at sexual attraction – spend their time with grandfather Manuel. Meanwhile, Ignacio's successes with the axe are such that he returns home with a prize motor car, followed by reporters and photographers. His affair with Catalina continues while Juan, becoming increasingly imbalanced, attempts in vain to persuade his sister to sleep with him. Having stolen a camera, old Manuel and his two grandchildren develop an interest in photography until lovers Ignacio and Catalina take off together for America, later sending for Peru. Peru and Cristina keep in touch via letters and photographs; some time later, Peru tells her he has married and become a photographer. 'War In The Forest': 1936. Peru returns to the valley as a photographer covering the Civil War for an American newspaper, and meets Cristina. Their grandfather has died and together they look through his paintings, which had become increasingly sinister as he approached the end of his life. The Mendiluze house is empty, and Peru's uncle Juan has apparently joined up with the nationalists. A warning that soldiers are drawing near sends the village men out into the woods. Most of the men are killed, and Peru is captured and lined up to face a firing squad. There he faces Juan, who spares him. He finds Cristina and the two leave on horseback for France.

● *Vacas* deals with what is commonly regarded as the typical stuff of Spanish drama. Codes of honour, deep-seated family rivalries, passion suppressed in a stagnant community, and passion unleashed – the stuff of Andalusian romance. *Vacas* is in fact directed by a Basque (a former film critic and feature debutant) and made in the Basque Country, but the two regions are recognised as having affinities in their folklore. However, the typical is not necessarily brought into focus. For instance, Ignacio's wife Madalen – who is left at home while her husband seduces the neighbour, and who is eventually abandoned – might herself have been at the centre of a tragedy. But here she remains a shadowy figure, part of the backdrop.

What *Vacas* does draw on is a strong stylistic tendency in Spanish creativity, recognisable too in Spanish-American magic realism, in which the unexpected and the fantastical intrude on the realistic. It is an intrusion which film is particularly well suited to catch. Within a generally naturalistic style which at times has a graphic, documentary quality – a blood-encased calf

is pulled with a rope from its mother's womb – the camera may sweep or tilt, or suddenly change viewpoint, so that we may be asked to view the world through the eyes of a cow. Or else it will transform a routine gesture, the throwing of an axe for instance, into a fantastic one: the rotating axe flying across fields.

This style collaborates with the episodic structure to suggest a fairy tale in which we accept that the extraordinary just happens. Two pairs of lovers – Ignacio and Catalina, Peru and Cristina – escape the mournful reality, the second couple after years apart and fleeing on a charger. It follows that *Vacas* also has the thinness of fairy tale in character and in motivation: Medem shows no interest in presenting psychologically complex individuals.

Fairy tales can also be brutal. Happiness in them is located elsewhere. Within the valley, this elsewhere is the woods, a favourite place of escape in children's fiction, while for old Manuel it is into his own fantasy world and his 'art'. By contrast, 'reality' in the film is unrelentingly dark. Action is bounded by bloody war, by two civil wars at that, neighbour killing neighbour; two of the characters are mad; one act of incest is attempted, and another is achieved. The fantasy, Medem suggests, grows out of this bleak world. Like Manuel's art, it is perhaps a strategy to cope with it. Medem's sure direction has the stylistic flexibility to accommodate these contrasting tones.

Cutting across the dialectic fantasy and reality dialectic is the interplay between observing and being observed, between possessing and being possessed. Manuel's obsession with cows – of which there are several, although they function as the same one – begins when he gazes into the eyes of one after feigning death, and imagines a look of accusation. Cows are particularly well suited as a screen for our projections because of the inscrutable expression they wear. Manuel's paintings – always of cows – become his means of observing in turn, his way of taking control. When he sees a camera for the first time, he seizes it less for its ability to produce another type of artefact, more because it allows him to get behind the lens, to occupy what he imagines to be the cow's position – observing and powerful.

Cows are also firmly embedded in the valley's economic realities: they are a source of income, valuable commodities (Ignacio is given one as a prize). There is no suggestion, however, that they have a value beyond this economic one (they are not, for instance, the religious icons that Hinduism makes of them) except, that is, for Manuel, whose imagination transforms the everyday, raising the messy animals to omnipotent status. As Medem's camera spins us through the eyes of a cow, taking us deep into its head – as a sci-fi TV programme might have taken us down a vortex – he alerts us to the comic absurdity of Manuel's musings.

Robert Yates

La Vieille qui marchait dans la mer (The Old Lady Who Walked in the Sea)

France 1991

Director: Laurent Heynemann

Certificate

18

Distributor

Gala

Production Companies

Blue Dahlia
production/S.F.C./
Films A2/Little Bear/
J.M. Productions
In association with
Canal Plus/Sofiap and
Investimage 3/
Gruppo Bema (Rome)/
Centre National de la
Cinématographie

Producer

Gérard Jourdhui
Production Co-ordinator
Catherine Pierrat
Production Manager
Gérard Gaultier

Casting

Shula Siegfried
Assistant Director
Tristan Ganne
Screenplay
Dominique Roulet
Based on the novel
by San Antonio

Adaptations

Dominique Roulet
Laurent Heynemann
Director of Photography

Robert Alazraki
In colour

Editor

Jacques Comets
Production Designer
Valérie Grall
Music

Philippe Sarde

Costume Design

Catherine Leterrier
Wardrobe Supervisor
Charlotte David

Make-up

Anne Bourdiol
Nurith Barkan
Catherine
Demesmaecker

Sound Editors

Marion Monestier
Adeline Yoyotte-Husson
Jean-Pierre Laforce

Sound Recordist

Michel Desrois

Sound Effects

Jean-Pierre Lelong

Stunt Adviser

Daniel Perche

Cast

Jeanne Moreau
Lady M
Michel Serrault
Pompilius
Luc Thuillier
Lambert
Géraldine Danon
Noémie
Jean Bouchaud
Mazurier
Marie-Dominique Aumont
Muriel
Hester Wilcox
Director's Daughter
Lea Gabriele
Girl in Blue
Lara Guirao
Librarian
Mattia Sbragia
Stern
Francis Renaud
Daniel Vérité
Sathyadevi F. Ralingam
Sushma Unnikrishnam
Gilles Rousseau
Caroline Kunti-Leconte
Darmaraja Ravi
Pratapan Nagarathnam

8,463 feet

94 minutes

Subtitles

friendly terms with Lady M, is throwing a twenty-first birthday party for his daughter. As a finale to the grand event, he intends to give her a priceless diadem. At the party, Lambert distracts the security guard and pockets the crown, replacing it with a fake.

As the summer wears on, Lambert wearies of his relationship with the old lady, who insists he sleep with her and treats him as a child. He starts an affair with a young Parisian woman. He expects Lady M to be furious, and is surprised when she allows him to bring Noémie back to the chateau. As he and Noémie make love, Lady M watches them on close circuit TV, courtesy of a hidden camera in Lambert's room. The next day, Lady M invites Noémie to lunch. When the meal ends, she shows Lambert and Noémie a video of their love-making. Noémie flees in disgust.

A private detective, hired by the prince to recover the stolen diadem, pays a visit to the chateau, confronting Lady M with the knowledge that Lambert, whom she tried to pass off as her nephew, left his fingerprints all over the scene of the crime. Rather than admit her or Lambert's guilt, she blames the theft on Pompilius, hiding the crown in his room. Although the prince does not press charges, the shame of being wrongfully branded an inept thief is more than the old man can bear, and he hangs himself.

Lady M decamps to Paris with Lambert in tow. She seems to be growing senile. By now, Lambert is devoted to her. They are staying in a smart hotel. Lambert passes himself off as a bellhop, and steals some rough diamonds from a businessman in an adjoining room. The sight of this booty helps Lady M recapture her memory. She and Lambert return to the south of France. As they stroll along the beach, Lady M concocts her most far-fetched scheme yet: to take Lambert to London and steal the Crown Jewels.

Two years ago, writing a summation of Jeanne Moreau's career for *Film Dope*, J.C. Blake hazarded the opinion that her work, "at least as a film actress, may be considered complete." While such a verdict says as much about *Film Dope's* archival fetish for putting its subjects in pigeon-holes as it does about any hiatus in Moreau's career, Blake had a point: arguably, Moreau's last truly memorable role was as the brothel keeper in Fassbinder's *Querelle*.

The film-makers with whom she was most famously associated – figures like Losey, Truffaut, Buñuel and Welles – were already dead and embalmed in movie myth. Having outlived New Wave and New German Cinema alike, she was in danger of being treated as a colourful relic of a lost age, an actress who would be condemned to brief, grandmotherly cameos like her part in Besson's *Nikita*, perhaps cast in the occasional BBC play, but rarely afforded the opportunities her talent still warranted.

Laurent Heynemann's sardonic comedy at least grants Moreau the status of

a star-in-exile. She plays the wonderfully exotic Lady M, a character halfway between Shakespeare's Prospero and Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*. First spotted standing in the sea like an inebriated stork, she is a cantankerous and arthritic old lady, vainly clinging to her looks, and keeping herself busy in her dotage with a little light burglary, blackmail and voyeurism. Although adapted from a novel by San Antonio, the movie seems hand-made as a vehicle for Moreau. Throughout, she appears in a startling array of wigs and oversize hats, and her sheer presence and crinkled beauty are too much for the rest of the cast, or the rather flimsy narrative, to contain. Heynemann dutifully defers to his leading lady's powerful persona, organizing the action round her. He makes full use of her gloriously husky voice on the soundtrack, perhaps consciously echoing her voice-over in Malle's *Les Amants*, which first made her a star more than 30 years ago.

Lady M, her old suitor Pompilius and his young rival Laurent form an extraordinary ménage à trois, one which recalls the similarly strained Swanson/Holden/Von Stroheim axis in *Sunset Boulevard*, but which sometimes makes the movie seem like a gerontophile *Jules et Jim*. In a key scene, Lady M takes Laurent into her confidence, offering to show him her most valued treasure. Given her enthusiasm for stolen jewellery, he expects this will be some priceless bauble. But, when she opens the safe – its number is 2017, the number of lovers she claims to have had – the precious treasure is an old box full of memorabilia. Briefly, character and star mesh as we see stills of Moreau in her prime.

In a film mainly set on the French Riviera, primary colours abound. Heynemann strives for a sense of ripeness close to decay. This applies as much to the characters as to the landscapes. Just as Lady M's beauty is impaired by age, she and Pompilius – despite their excess of manners and hauteur – are corrupt, dessicated creatures. Even their language stews: they start every conversation in a formal, polite way, but swiftly change gear, slipping into an unseemly slanging match, with both parties becoming progressively more lurid as they describe the other's rotting flesh.

As Lady M's courtiers-cum-suitors, Michel Serrault and Luc Thuillier are fine, the former fussy and dapper, like an elderly Ronald Colman with his blazer and moustache, the latter counterpointing the general mood of senescence with his own, sub-*Baywatch* brand of vitality. Heynemann takes satirical swipes at the venality of the Riviera jet set, and extracts plenty of comedy from the clash between generations. Still, this would be pretty innocuous stuff if it weren't for Moreau's presence. With her familiar sneer, her over-exaggerated limp and sheer malevolent enjoyment of the part, she adds a little bile to what otherwise might merely have been quaint.

Geoffrey Macnab

Wide Sargasso Sea

Australia 1992

Director: John Duigan

Certificate

18

Distributor

Rank

Production Company

Sargasso Productions

For New Line Cinema

A Laughing

Kookaburra

production

Executive Producer

Sara Risher

Executive in Charge of Production

Deborah Moore

Producer

Jan Sharp

Line Producer

Karen Koch

Production Co-ordinators

Beth Depatie

Carmen Franczyk

Production Manager

Joyce Herlihy

Unit Production Manager

Eric McLeod

Location Manager

Peter Packer

Executive in charge of Post-production

Joe Fineman

Post-production Supervisor

Pam Winn

Post-production Co-ordinator

Terri Harithas

2nd Unit Director

Jan Sharp

Casting

USA:

Aletta Chapelle

London:

Elisabeth Mackie

Paris:

Françoise Combadière

Jamaica:

Cecile S. Burrowes

Cathy Levy

Cyprian Thomas

Assistant Directors

Charles Rotheram

P.J. Voeten

James Cohen

Denise A. Lannaman

Bosie Vine Miller

Simon Morganti

Screenplay

Jan Sharp

Carole Angier

John Duigan

Based on the novel

by Jean Rhys

Director of Photography

Geoff Burton

In colour

North England Photography

Gabriel Beristain

Underwater Photography

Gary Kapo

2nd Unit Camera Operator

Richard Lannaman

Optical Effects

Cinema Research

Corporation

Fire Animation

David M. Garber

Editors

Anne Goursaud

Jimmy Sandoval

Production Designers

Frankie D

North England:

Michael Howells

Art Directors

Susan Bolles

North England:

Drago Michie

Underwater:

Kathleen Cooper

Set Decorator

Ron von Blombert

Set Dresser

Sasha Schnerd

Scenic Artist

Don Alfred Geyra

Storyboard Artist

Rodney Ascher

Special Effects

Co-ordinator

Steve Kirshoff

Mechanical Effects

Co-ordinator

John Peter Dabdoub

Music

Stewart Copeland

Music Extracts

"Quartet" by Franz

Schubert; "String

Quartet Opus 64 no.5

Minuet" by Franz

Joseph Haydn;

"Briccialdi: Andante"

Music Producer

Jeff Seitz

Music Editor

Michael Dittick

Choreography

Lenneth Richards

Costume Design

Norma Moriceau

Wardrobe Supervisors

Melanie Ghisays

North England:

Janet Lucas

Make-up Artist

Noriko Watanabe

Title Design

Wayne Fitzgerald

Sound Design

Harry Cohen

Supervising Sound Editor

Brad Blake

Sound Editors

Steve Nelson

Cathie Speakman

ADR Editor

Tony Berkeley

Sound Recordists

Michael McDuffie

Music:

Jeff Seitz

Foley Recordist

Brian Geer

Dolby stereo

Consultant:

Thom Ehle

Sound Re-recordists

Ken S. Polk

Ken Teaney

Sound Effects Editors

Harry Cohen

Ann Scibelli

Foley Artists

Gregg Barbanell

Vince Nicastro

Jamaican Consultant

Sally Porteous

Cast

Karina Lombard

Antoinette Cosway

Nathaniel Parker

Rochester

Rachel Ward

Annette Cosway

Michael York

Paul Mason

Martine Beswick

Aunt Cora

Claudia Robinson

Christophene

Huw Christie Williams

Richard Mason

Casey Borna

Young Antoinette

Rowena King

Amelie

Ben Thomas

Daniel Cosway

Paul Campbell

Young Bull

Audrey Pilatus

Drummer

Ancile Gloudin

Nelson

Dominic Needham

Pierre

Kevin Thomas

Benbow

Aisha King

Myra

Anika Gordon

Hilda

Elfrieda Reid

Rose

Bobby Smith

Machete Man

Suzanne McMannus

Florinda

Pat Gooden

Margaretta

Clifford Burt

Fraser

Naomi Watts

Fanny Grey

James Earl

Man with Torch

Kayasha Russell

Cora's Maid

Jenny Wilson

Grace Poole

Helen Woods

Leah

8,863 feet

98 minutes

Jamaica, 1844. After the emancipation of the slaves, the plantation-owning Cosway family falls apart, with Mr Cosway drinking himself to death. His widow Annette remarries Paul Mason, an Englishman. Mason settles in with Annette and her two children Antoinette and Pierre, and takes over the running of the estate. His manner and methods are disliked by the servants. Annette is also unhappy about his behaviour and turns to drink. One night former slaves set fire

to the house. The family escapes, but later Pierre dies of burns. Mason returns to England, while the grief-stricken Annette deteriorates mentally and is sent to an institution. Antoinette is brought up by her aunt Cora and the faithful family servant Christophene. A few years later Mason dies and Antoinette is informed that the estate has been left to her on condition that she marry. Her step-uncle arranges for her to marry Rochester, a young gentleman from England. On his arrival in Jamaica, Rochester finds it hard to adapt to the new country. Antoinette is at first disappointed with her husband-to-be and calls off the wedding. Later she is persuaded that she has no choice but to marry him. Antoinette falls in love with Rochester during their honeymoon. Though he reciprocates her passion, he remains puzzled by her and by her country.

One day Rochester receives a letter from Antoinette's cousin, Daniel Cosway, informing him that Antoinette has Creole blood and that her mother is insane. When Rochester questions Antoinette, she informs him that her mother died in the fire. Rochester begins to feel alienated from his wife. He is also suspicious of Christophene, who now lives with them and whom he is told has magic powers. When Rochester spends a couple of days away in the city, Christophene tries to persuade Antoinette to leave her husband.

Rochester returns to find another letter from Cosway, so pays him a visit.

Rochester questions Antoinette again about her mother and she tells him the truth. That night Antoinette gives Rochester a drugged drink and he hallucinates. When he wakes up, he wanders into the house's courtyard and meets Amelie, one of the servants. They make love and Antoinette discovers them together. Relations between Rochester and Antoinette go from bad to worse and she turns to drink, convinced that she will end up like her mother. The household is in chaos and the servants leave. Later Rochester is informed that his brother has died and that he must return to England as heir to the family home, Thornfield Hall. In spite of the protestations of Christophene and Cora, he takes Antoinette back with him and installs her in the attic at Thornfield. A few years later, it is announced that Rochester is to marry the governess, Jane Eyre. A fire is started in Thornfield Hall's attic and as the house blazes, a figure is seen dancing on the roof.

Jean Rhys' mesmerising novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* has finally made it to the cinema screen after a troubled history, during which it was optioned and abandoned many times. No doubt its fragmented narrative did not translate easily into a conventional screenplay. And it's difficult to imagine Rhys' vivid and sensual prose transformed into cinematic idiom without reducing it to the obvious. Indeed, the heart sinks as this film version opens



Calm without the storm: Casey Borna

with shots of skeins of seaweed swaying in an aquamarine-tinted light. It brings to mind Hitchcock's suggestion that film-makers in search of adaptations should stick to expanding on short stories, distilling their essence into something new rather than attempting dull faithfulness.

Rhys' book is itself a disruptive re-writing of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, inventing an avenging history for the first Mrs Rochester, the tortured soul who rampages through the upper storeys of Thornfield Hall. Rochester's first wife has already been given the film treatment. Made in 1943, Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur's chilling *I Walked with a Zombie* anticipated Rhys in transposing the Brontë novel to the Caribbean and investigating the background of the ill-fated Bertha Mason. That film similarly suggests that she is not mad, but the victim of a voodoo spell. Magic and the tradition of the obeah are also invoked in Rhys' novel. But Antoinette's conviction that she is becoming dead to the world is given a real basis in her lack of economic power – after all, though she bought Rochester with a dowry, she has no control over him. Her fear is also rooted in the idea that she is destined to follow in her insane mother's faltering footsteps. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is therefore an unsettling family ghost story about the female predicament.

Director John Duigan might have picked up a few tips from the Lewton-Tourneur movie about how to create an intense and disturbing atmosphere. Despite panoramic shots of the lush Jamaican countryside and intimations of the island's overwhelming noise, his film lacks the necessary mood of feverish dread. The characters' descent into madness is so clearly signposted that there is never any danger of the audience succumbing to disorientation.

It is almost as if the film were afraid of conjuring up the 'otherness' foregrounded by Rhys, and can only visualise it in a trite manner. A scene in which Rochester and Antoinette make love cuts away to one in which the black servants are dancing to a raucous beat. The warm and musty (by implication, female) Jamaica is diabolic for the stiff and pale demi-patrician Rochester (Nathaniel Parker sporting a Cliff Richard hairstyle fits the bill almost too perfectly), while England is a "cold, dark dream" to Antoinette. This is represented in an equally stereotyped way by the stone- and oak-panelled Thornfield mansion, which is stock English heritage, complete with stuffed deer's head. This mythical England is far from the strange, exotic world in which she eventually finds herself trapped. Indeed, at the end of the Rhys novel she remarks, "This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England." Karina Lombard may scowl and sulk as Antoinette, but there is scant evidence of the terrible passion that finally brings the cardboard house crashing down. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is never the storm of a film it should have been.

Lizzie Francke

TV FILM

Histoire(s) du cinéma (History(ies) of the Cinema)

France/Switzerland 1989

Director: Jean-Luc Godard

Distributor

Channel 4 Television

Production Companies

JLG Films/LaSept

/FR3/Gaumont/

Centre National de

la Cinématographie/

Radio Télévision Suisse

Romande/Vega Films

Producer

Jean-Luc Godard

Co-producer

Ruth Waldburger

Screenplay

Jean-Luc Godard

Editor

Jean-Luc Godard

Video

Jean-Luc Godard

Pierre Binggeli

Hervé Duhamel

In colour

Sound

François Musy

Pierre-Alain Besse

Jean-Luc Godard

English version

Orna Kustow

(at 25 fps)

100 minutes

Subtitles



The scribbled screen

Godard narrates a montage of images from different media and genres – painting, photography, cinema and video, fiction and documentary – to present some of the possible stories in the history of cinema. Part 1A: *Toutes les Histoires* (All the (Hi)Stories). Godard ranges back and forth between post-Revolutionary Soviet cinema and the growth and consolidation of Hollywood to the birth of television. The power of Hollywood, as represented by studio bosses Irving Thalberg and Howard Hughes, is contrasted with the equal social importance of cinemas in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. The outbreak of World War II, the Occupation of France, the Holocaust and the aftermath of the war are traced through images from painting and film and the effects of war on Europe's national cinemas.

Part 1B: *1 Histoire Seule* (1 Single History). Godard turns back to cinematic pioneers, the Lumière brothers and Muybridge, while in parallel analysing "the two great ideas: sex and death," with particular emphasis on the allure of the starlet. Considered as the inheritor of photographic realism, cinema is also seen in the light of industrial development and imperialism.

Originally commissioned by the French cable channel Canal Plus, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is a project which seems always to have been latent in Godard's work. From the profligate citation of the *nouvelle vague* films onwards, the director's relation to cinema, its history and to the other arts have been enduring motifs. *Histoire(s)* – of which these are the first two parts in a proposed ten – originates from a series of lectures that Godard gave in 1977 in Montreal and later collected in a book *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, in which he wrote that such a history, in order to be "true", must be made of "pictures and sounds, not of illustrated texts".

The method of the lectures – associating, juxtaposing, synthesising his own films with others – is carried over into the present work and elaborated by reference to painting, newsreel and television. In short, this is Dr Godard's True History of the Image, but a history refracted decisively through cinema. In terms of technique, tone and technology, *Histoire(s)* is another chapter in the adventure that Serge Daney called "Godardian pedagogy", one that has been marked by its thorough engagement with video. But these programmes, while they continue the hybridization of media begun with *Ici et ailleurs* (1974), have less in common with the sense of impotence and despair that clouded *Numéro deux* (1975) than with the creative and conceptual liberation demonstrated to dazzling effect in *Scénario du film Passion* (1982).

The images in *Histoire(s)* can be read either vertically, as palimpsests concealing many other possible images within them, in the hope that "the miracle of watching what we cannot see" might transpire; or horizontally,

as "cells" in the memory of cinema to be recombined into "one of the histories that might have been, that will be, that have been". Exemplary of the former approach is Godard's confronting an image of Liz Taylor and Montgomery Clift – "an image of happiness," he calls it – and another (subterranean) image of horror: "If George Stevens hadn't been the first to use the first 16mm colour film in Ravensbruck and Auschwitz, Liz Taylor's happiness might never have found *A Place in the Sun*." Wartime newsreels pervade part 1A, and particularly impressive is the video-mixing of war footage with landscape by Monet. The montage works as a forcefully literal image of "invasion" (of France by Germany, of Monet's 'light' by the newsreel's bleak monochrome) and as an image of cinema as being suddenly more necessary, more responsive to the call of history than painting, of one art form "occupying" the function of another.

These newsreel images, the voice-over intones, were "not shown on a screen, but on a shroud" – a potent reminder that, for Godard (whose influence on End-of-Cinema discourse is immense), this project is indispensable "mourning-work". No surprise, then, that in Part 1B he returns to *Le Mépris*, his first film to be marked by a developing register of nostalgia and regret for lost mythologies, be they derived from classical Hollywood or classical Greece. And while this lamentation has intimate, anecdotal asides – "Farewell, my lovely," he whispers to an image of Anna Karina, "bonjour, tristesse," – it is the Godardian belief that cinema's grand spectacle and Romantic artistic undertaking is ever endangered that yields up his subscription to the Great Man theory of history. Included here are Thalberg, Eisenstein, Lang, Renoir, and Howard Hughes, "owner of TWA, producer of *Citizen Kane* – as if Méliès had owned Gallimard and the SNCF." But then this is history as Godardian mythology, and myth requires gods just as it does devils – the latter here being Hitler, imperialism, and television.

Just as its images are treated as palimpsests, so *Histoire(s) du cinéma* deploys the possibilities of video editing (wipes, keying, superimposition, writing direct on the image) as well as a correspondingly dense and polyvocal soundtrack, to become a text with as many layers as there are possible interpretations of history. Godard once again here uses his technology like a video-quill, annotating, scratching out, thinking live on, in and with the images. Here however, Godard stages himself not in front of "the white page" of the screen, but apart from it, behind an electronic typewriter, beside a bookshelf, from which position he recites the titles of books and films as if bidding the off-screen space to answer back, to open up a dialogue. *Histoire(s)* is video "thinking what cinema creates" – to quote French critic Philippe Dubois – and doing so in the manner of a wake lit by fireworks.

Chris Darke

REVIEW

Mark Kermode reviews this month's rental releases and laser discs and Peter Dean new retail videos

Reviews in Monthly Film Bulletin and Sight and Sound are cited in parentheses.

A retail video that has previously been reviewed in the rental section will be listed only and the film review reference given. The term 'Premiere' refers to a film that has had no prior UK theatrical release and is debuting on video. □ denotes closed captioning facility

Rental

Best of the Best 2

USA 1992/Entertainment EV EVV 1244

Certificate 18 Director Robert Radler Martial arts-style violence, high-tech sets and a parodic edge make this a top exploitation pic. Eric Roberts and Phillip Rhee infiltrate an underground gladiator ring to avenge the death of their former partner. Great cameo performance by Wayne Newton. (S&S May 1993)

The Bodyguard

USA 1992/Warner V0 12591

Certificate 15 Director Mick Jackson Romantic nonsense with Kevin Costner (sporting the world's worst haircut) and Whitney Houston, although clearly hating one another, having to pretend that they are in love. The thundering pop score is equally appalling. (S&S January 1993) □

Deep Cover

USA 1992/First Independent VA 20189

Certificate 18 Director Bill Duke A gripping undercover cop thriller. Jeff Goldblum is deliciously slimy as the wealthy city slicker-cum-pusher whose organisation is infiltrated by Larry Fishburne. Co-writer Michael Tolkin's powerful anti-racist and anti-drug message comes across strongly. (S&S February 1993)

A River Runs Through It

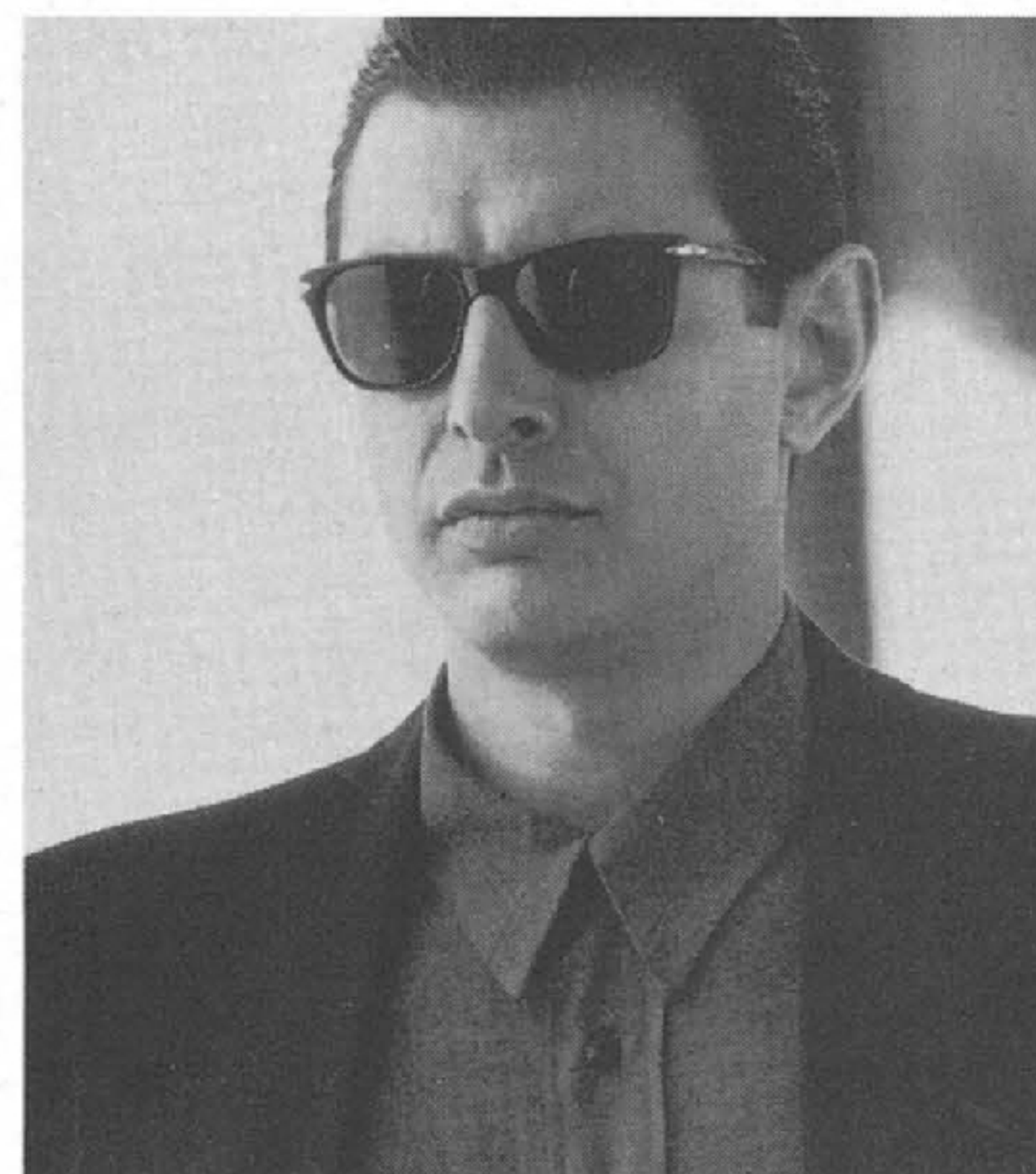
USA 1992/Guild G8676

Certificate PG Director Robert Redford Handsomely presented in widescreen, Redford's adaptation of Norman Maclean's rites-of-passage tale confirms his directing talent. Craig Sheffer and Brad Pitt are Montana youths taught the secrets of life via the fishing techniques of their father. (S&S February 1993)

Sister Act

USA 1992/Touchstone D314522

Certificate PG Director Emile Ardolino Musical comedy about a nightclub singer (Whoopi Goldberg) who turns a convent choir into a pop group. Badly scripted, directed and acted. (S&S December 1992)



Slick & slimy: Jeff Goldblum in 'Deep Cover'

Sneakers

USA 1992/CIC Video VHA 1621

Certificate PG Director Phil Alden Robinson Dreary high-tech comedy-thriller, uninteresting despite the star-studded cast (Robert Redford, Sidney Poitier, Dan Aykroyd, River Phoenix). A team of professional security system hackers are hired for a covert government operation which is not what it seems. (S&S December 1992)

Stay Tuned

USA 1992/Warner V0 12595

Certificate PG Director Peter Hyams A couch potato husband and his wife are sucked into a demonic TV set and are given 24 hours to escape. Hyams' satire on American television is packed with movie gags ("Wayne's Underworld", "Three Men and Rosemary's Baby") but fails to achieve the satirical edge of *Shock Treatment*. (S&S March 1993)

Tale of a Vampire

UK 1992/Columbia TriStar CVT 20240

Certificate 18 Director Shimako Sato An impressive directorial debut, this atmospheric vampire romance was shot on a tiny budget around well-chosen locations in Deptford. Julian Sands is perfectly cast as a fey bloodsucker in search of his lost love. Ponderous but enjoyable. (S&S March 1993)

This Is My Life

USA 1993/FoxVideo 1953

Certificate 15 Director Nora Ephron Screenwriter Ephron (*When Harry Met Sally*) turns uncertainly to directing with this whimsical tale of a stand-up comedienne's rise to fame. Julie Kavner carries the piece with her endearing central performance and the script bubbles away pleasantly. (S&S December 1992) □

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

USA 1992/Guild 8692

Certificate 18 Director David Lynch The most inventive and nerve-shattering movie of last year. Lynch's prequel to his cult TV show rivals William Peter Blatty's *The Ninth Configuration* as the zenith of American metaphysical cinema. Traumatised incest victim Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) is driven into a nightmarish netherworld. (S&S November 1992)

Wind

USA 1992/Entertainment EV EVV 1261

Certificate PG Director Carroll Ballard Although actor Matthew Modine has expressed his displeasure at the lack of substance or characterisation in this sports movie, neither detail is particularly missed. Waves crash, the soundtrack creaks and the wind whistles through Modine's hair as he wins the America's Cup. (S&S April 1993)

Wuthering Heights

USA/UK 1992/CIC Video VHB 2749

Certificate U Director Peter Kosminsky Kosminsky takes a bold swipe at Emily Brontë's Gothic romance helped by Anne Devlin's excellent script. Unlike earlier adaptations this version follows the novel through to its earthy conclusion. Ralph Fiennes is excellent while Juliette Binoche does her best with her irrepressible French accent. (S&S October 1992)

Rental premiere

Almost Pregnant

USA 1992/Columbia TriStar CVT 16817

Certificate 18 Director Michael DeLuise Producer Ray Haboush Screenplay Fred Stroppel Lead Actors Tanya Roberts, Joan Severance, Jeff Conway, John Calvin, Dom DeLuise 89 minutes An almost unwatchable sex comedy about fertilisation. Tanya Roberts, married to a man with a low sperm count, seeks the services of his friend to impregnate her. Dom DeLuise pops up as a 'humorous' doctor.

American Ninja 5

USA 1992/Warner PEV 32023

Certificate 18 Director Bobby Gene Leonard Producer Ovidio G. Assonitis Screenplay George Saunders Lead Actors David Bradley, Anne Dupont, Lee Reyes, Pat Morita 98 minutes American Ninja latecomer Bradley continues to breathe new life into this successful martial arts series. □

Blood and Sand

Spain 1992/Hi Fliers HFV 8236

Certificate 18 Director Javier Elorrieta Producer José Frade Screenplay Rafael Azcona, Ricardo Franco, Thomas Fucci Lead Actors Sharon Stone, Christopher Rydell, Ana Torrent, Antonio Flores 91 minutes An alluring wealthy woman (Stone) tempts a prize matador (Christopher Rydell) into a destructive affair.

A Day in October

USA/Denmark 1991/Hi Fliers HFV 8238

Certificate 15 Director Kenneth Madsen Producers Just Betzer, Philippe River Screenplay Damien F. Slattery Lead Actors D.B. Sweeney, Kelly Wolf, Daniel Benzali, Ole Lemmeke, Tovah Feldshuh 96 minutes A slow-moving yet solidly-constructed drama concerning the resistance of Danish Jews to the Nazi occupation.

Darkness Before Dawn

USA 1992/Odyssey ODY 345

Certificate 15 Director John Patterson Executive Producer Judith A. Polone Screenplay Karen Hall Lead Actors Meredith Baxter, Stephen Lang, Gwyneth Walsh, L. Scott Caldwell 89 minutes A methadone clinic nurse, secretly addicted to drugs, attempts to start a new life with one of her patients in this true-life TV drama.

Death Ring

USA 1991/Hi Fliers HFV 8233

Certificate 18 Director R.J. Kizer Producer Gary M. Bettman Screenplay George T. Lebrun Lead Actors Mike Norris, Billy Drago, Chad McQueen, Don Swayze 87 minutes Another efficient if uninspired action rehash of *The Most Dangerous Game*. An ex-special forces officer is kidnapped by a billionaire and is used as bait for his private gladiatorial entertainment.

Delta Heat

USA 1992/Entertainment EV EVV 1247

Certificate 15 Director Michael Fische Producers Richard L. Albert, Rudy Cohen Screenplay Sam A. Scribener

All cut up

The story goes something like this. *The Wild Bunch* is one of your favourite films, so of course you want to have a copy on tape, to which end you've recorded the film off ITV, being perfectly aware that several moments of violence have been censored. Finally Warner Home Video releases the film on sell-through and you rush out to replace your butchered copy with what you hope will be a complete one. At first, despite a shaky pan-and-scan treatment, things look promising, since the Warner tape includes the four violent moments missing from the ITV screening. However, you're shocked to discover that one of the most important scenes in the film is completely missing – the flashback depicting Pike's romance with a married woman (played by Aurora Clavel, whose name still appears in the credits and who was later to disappear from both director's and studio's cuts of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*) – despite the fact that it was present in ITV's print. Hold on tight – you're moving into a land of both shadow and substance. You've just crossed over into the Alternative Versions Zone.

Given the availability of so many different versions of any film, the only thing you can be certain of when you buy a video is that you can't be certain of anything. Partly this is due to the belief of most video companies that the consumer's ignorance is the distributor's bliss. CBS-Fox, for instance, is perfectly aware that while describing its expanded versions of *Betty Blue* and *The Big Blue* as the "version integrale" and "version longue" will increase sales, describing their butchered US release print of *The Sicilian* (30 minutes shorter than the print shown in British cinemas) as the "version merde" would have quite the opposite effect.

Distributor ignorance

Mostly, however, the distributors are in fact ignorant as to the nature of their product. Take David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone*: when this was first released on tape, at the height of the Video Nasty witch hunt, EMI made several cuts in the film's quite mild scenes of violence, shortening the murder on the gazebo and eliminating the bathtub suicide of the Castle Rock killer. An identical print was used for the film's subsequent release on the Warner label, but recently the film was reissued by Castle Vision, double-billed with *Firestarter* and available exclusively from Woolworths, in an uncut form, something that obviously escaped the attention of the distributor, since there is no indication of this fact on the packaging.

The recent release by Redemption of Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* can also presumably be filed under 'distributor ignorance', since the heavily cut print (which is, incidentally, of appalling quality) is identical to that distributed on 16mm in the UK by Cinegate. Redemption's print runs 62 minutes, 7 seconds, whereas that shown on Channel 4 in the mid-80s (taken from the National Film Archive print that formed the basis of Mark



Just one version too many: 'The Wild Bunch', cut by ITV and Warner Home Video

Nash's analysis of the film in the Autumn 1976 Screen) runs 68 minutes, 18 seconds.

Indeed the television companies have often turned out to be more reliable in their choice of prints than the video distributors: *Pirates*, *Cul-de-Sac*, *The Disappearance*, *A Boy and his Dog*, *Taste the Blood of Dracula*, *Road Games*, *The Natural*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *Firefox*, *The Boyfriend*, *Howard the Duck*, *Enemy Mine*, *The Abyss*, *ELST*, *The Wicker Man*, *Hell in the Pacific*, *The 'burbs* and *The Kremlin Letter* all run longer on television than on video. Of particular interest are ITV's version of *The Shining*, taken from a US print running 25 minutes longer than the UK cinema/video version; Channel 4's print of Harry Krumel's *Malpertuis*, which includes a Caligariesque ending, totally missing from the version released by several video labels, in which the entire film is revealed to have been the nightmare of a computer expert; and the BBC's version of Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*, which runs 123 minutes and has a nostalgic yellowish tint. The version of the Altman film released on video by Braveworld is, surprisingly, letterboxed, but is taken from a print re-edited by the producer Dino De Laurentiis which runs 105 minutes and is processed in normal Technicolor. Cuts include Evelyn Lear's performance of 'The Last Rose of Summer', without which Altman's delicately nuanced attitude to the ideology represented by the wild west show becomes virtually incomprehensible.

This is not, of course, to imply that films are invariably shown on television in the most complete versions available. Channel 4 in particular, despite a commitment to showing films "as they have been made", seems to attract cut prints like a magnet. Its copy of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is missing the final number 'Super-Heroes', which is included in CBS-Fox's video; *The Killing of Sister George* features a heavily censored sex scene (again the video is complete); *Persona* is missing Bibi Andersson's first meeting with Liv Ullmann; *The Moon and Sixpence* eliminates the colour sequences (the film has subsequently been shown uncut by the BBC); the letterboxed print of *Bitter Victory* is the US release version running 82 minutes – 18 minutes shorter

than the BBC's pan-and-scan version and eliminating the important scene in which Richard Burton investigates the ruins of a Berber City; *The Fury* is missing a 60 second sequence showing a group of men playing poker in a van, and the recently screened print of *Popeye* has had 18 minutes removed by the British distributor, including both of Ray Walston's numbers.

Longer versions

But it should be remembered that the most authentic version of a film is not necessarily the longest. The butchery carried out by studios often consisted of adding scenes as well as subtracting them. John Stahl inserted a clichéd love scene into Lubitsch's *The Student Prince*. Frederick Fleck directed a new ending for Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons* and someone, possibly Howard Hughes, added a ludicrously moralistic sequence in a newspaper office to Hawks' *Scarface*. Often even the director's express wishes can create problems: John Ford insisted that the released version of his splendid *They Were Expendable* ran some 30 minutes longer than he intended (and still managed to delete the character of the priest played by Wallace Ford), while the archivists who restored Budd Boetticher's *The Bullfighter and the Lady* to its original running time of 124 minutes were shocked when Boetticher asked them to make several cuts – after careful consideration they refused.

The longer television and video versions of the first two *Godfather* films are a case in point, for though the extra footage is nice to have, the reasons behind its original elimination are readily apparent. The shorter versions of these films thus maintain their precedence, the 'restored' sequences providing something more like a series of working notes that demonstrate the thought processes by which Coppola refined the films into their final shape. One might finally cite the additional evidence of the longer video version of Jim McBride's *The Big Easy*, which ends with a scene in a hospital that McBride was forced to shoot by his producer, a scene that the BBC's print quite properly eliminates. In the Alternative Versions Zone less occasionally does mean more.

Lead Actors Anthony Edwards, Lance Henriksen, Betsy Russell, Linda Dona 91 minutes

An LA cop teams up with a New Orleans ex-lawman to track a satanic serial killer in this lively sub-*Angel Heart* romp. Lance Henriksen is good as the grouchy swamp rat, but it's city slicker Anthony Edwards who gets the best one-liners.

Eyes of the Beholder

USA 1993/20.20 Vision NVT 19928

Certificate 18 Director Lawrence L. Simeone Producer David Henderson Screenplay Lawrence L. Simeone Lead Actors Joanna Pacula, Matt McCoy, George Lazenby, Kylie Travis 86 minutes A silly psycho-chiller featuring a poor script and wooden performances. A crazed serial killer takes revenge on the doctor who experimented on his brain without an anaesthetic.

Indecency

USA 1992/CIC Video VHA 1645

Certificate 15 Director Marisa Silver Producer Harvey Frand Screenplay Amy Holden Jones, Holly Goldberg Sloan, Alan Ormsby Lead Actors James Remar, Jennifer Beals, Barbara Williams, Sammi Davis-Voss 82 minutes Made-for-TV thriller, worth noting mainly for the participation of talented scriptwriter Alan Ormsby. The return of a career woman's roguish ex-husband leads to murder and blackmail.

In the Deep Woods

USA 1992/Columbia TriStar CVT 20239

Certificate 18 Director Charles Correll Producers Joel Fields, Ron Gilbert Screenplay Robert Nathan, Robert Rosenblum, based on the novel by Nicholas Conde Lead Actors Rosanna Arquette, Chris Rydell, Will Patton 94 minutes Nicholas (The Believers) Conde provides the inspiration for this trashy TV psycho-thriller which nonetheless retains its low-brow edge. An infirm Anthony Perkins delivers a hammy final performance as a man tracking a killer.

Lady Killer

USA 1992/CIC Video VHA 1625

Certificate 15 Director Michael Scott Producer Gordon Wolf Screenplay Shelley Evans Lead Actors Mimi Rogers, John Shea, Tom Irwin, Alice Krige 88 minutes An erotic thriller about a woman (Rogers) who begins a passionate affair with a debonair man suspected of two brutal killings.

Liar, Liar

Canada 1992/Odyssey ODY 353

Certificate 15 Director Jorge Montesi Executive Producer Phil Savath Screenplay Nancy N.J. Isaak Lead Actors Art Hindle, Rosemary Dunsmore, Vanessa King, Kate Nelligan 90 minutes *Omen IV* co-director Montesi turns again to the subject of horrifying childhoods, but this is more engaging than his earlier schlock-horror. Lawyers investigate when a rebellious eleven-year-old accuses her father of sexual abuse. An above average TV movie with a solid script and good casting.

A Message from Holly

USA 1992/Odyssey ODY 339

Certificate PG Director Rod Holcomb Producers Randy Siegel, Dalene Young

Screenplay Dalene Young *Lead Actors* Lindsay Wagner, Shelley Long, Cotter Smith, Molly Orr *90 minutes*
A terminally ill Lindsay Wagner hands over the care of her child to her friend Shelley Long. A mawkish TV movie, described as “heart-rending”.

Night Hunt

USA 1992/Medusa MC 402
Certificate 15 Director Bill Corcoran
Producer John Danylkiw *Screenplay* Steven Whitney *Lead Actors* Stephanie Powers, Helen Shaver, Kathleen Robertson, Larry Gilliard Jr *89 minutes*
TV thriller about three cultured women who stray into a district in LA and are hunted by a street gang. Interesting for its politically correct reversal of racial stereotypes – the multi-racial gang is lead by a white lunatic while a black cop and renegade black gang member are the only sympathetic characters.

Road to Ruin

USA 1992/Medusa MC 399
Certificate 15 Director Charlotte Brandstrom *Producer* Monique Annaud *Screenplay* Erik Anjou *Lead Actors* Peter Weller, Carey Lowell, Michel Duchaussoy *90 minutes*
Former hard-core tough guy Peter Weller changes roles and tries his hand at light romantic comedy, with uneven results. A wealthy tycoon decides to slum it so as to discover whether his true love wants him for himself or for his money.

Somebody’s Daughter

USA 1992/Hi Fliers HFV 8237
Certificate 15 Director/Producer Joseph Sargent *Screenplay* Barbara Turner *Lead Actors* Nicolette Sheridan, Nick Mancuso, Elliott Gould *92 minutes*
A streetwise LA stripper (Sheridan) and her vice cop boyfriend become involved in a murder mystery when a dancer’s mutilated body is discovered.

Stalin

USA 1992/Warner PEV 35583
Certificate PG Director Ivan Passer
Producer Mark Carliner *Screenplay* Paul Monash *Lead Actors* Robert Duvall, Julia Ormond, Jeroen Krabbé, Joan Plowright, Frank Finlay, Maximillian Schell *165 minutes*
A lavishly mounted TV mini-series chronicling the rise of one of this century’s most tyrannical leaders. Duvall, Schell and Plowright deservedly won Golden Globe awards for their performances as Stalin, Lenin and Stalin’s mother-in-law respectively.

Sweet Killing

USA 1992/Hi Fliers HFV 8230
Certificate 15 Director Eddy Matalon
Producer Suzanne Girard *Screenplay* Eddy Matalon, Dominique Roulet, based on the novel *Qualthrough* by Angus Hall *Lead Actors* Anthony Higgins, F. Murray Abraham, Michael Ironside, Leslie Hope, Andrea Fereol *86 minutes*
In this suspense mystery, a husband invents a fictional murderer to cover up his assassination of his wife and is visited by a mysterious character who claims to be his alibi.

Switching Parents

USA 1993/Odyssey ODY 354
Certificate PG Director/Producer Linda Otto

Screenplay Sharon Elizabeth Doyle *Lead Actors* Bill Smitrovich, Kathleen York, Robert Joy, Joseph Gordon-Levitt *88 minutes*
Art imitates life in this TV movie about a twelve-year-old boy who takes his abusive parents to court to sue for the right to live with his foster parents. Look out for the forthcoming David Koresh story.

A Town Torn Apart

USA 1992/Odyssey ODY 343
Certificate PG Director/Producer Daniel Petrie *Screenplay* Deena Goldstone *Lead Actors* Michael Tucker, Carole Galloway, Jill Eikenberry, Linda Griffiths *91 minutes*
Powerful true-life drama about a liberal teacher Dennis “Doc” Littky posted to a notorious and violent high school. Littky fights to instill a sense of learning into his pupils. Petrie directs with rewarding results.

Trancers III: Deth Lives

USA 1992/CIC Video VHB 2702
Certificate 15 Director C. Courtney Joyner
Producer Albert Band *Screenplay* C. Courtney Joyner *Lead Actors* Tim Thomerson, Melanie Smith, Andrew Robinson, Tony Pierce, Helen Hunt, Megan Ward *72 minutes*
In this mildly entertaining sci-fi sequel, a new breed of trancers threaten the human race and only cop Jack Deth can stop them. Originator Charles Band’s role is once again decreased and this – as with *Trancers II* – is not a patch on the original, but the extensive cameos and cheerfully cheap effects keep things going.

Vanished Without a Trace

USA 1993/Braveworld BRV 10152
Certificate PG Director Vern Gillum
Producer Ron Gilbert *Screenplay* David Eyre Jr, based on the book by Jack W. Baugh, Jefferson Morgan *Lead Actors* Karl Malden, Tim Ransom, Travis Fine, Tom Hodges, Odessa Ray *89 minutes*
Malden ably leads this true-life TV adaptation of the notorious Chowchilla kidnapping in which a bus-load of schoolchildren were hijacked and buried in an underground prison.

Whispers in the Dark

USA 1992/CIC Video VHB 2706
Certificate 18 Director Christopher Crowe
Producers Martin Bregman, Michael S. Bregman *Screenplay* Christopher Crowe *Lead Actors* Annabella Sciorra, Jamey Sheridan, Alan Alda, Jill Clayburgh, Anthony La Plagia *98 minutes*
A psychiatrist (Sciorra) becomes involved in a patient’s S/M fantasies with murderous results. Entertaining fare with a surprising conclusion, but clumsy panning and scanning means that characters are often cut out of key scenes. Crowe’s psycho-thriller is more intriguing than *Body of Evidence* and *Basic Instinct*.

Retail

The Art of Dying

USA 1992/MIA V 7541 Price £10.99
Certificate 18 Director Wings Hauser (S&S Video January 1993)

At Play in the Fields of the Lord

USA 1991/Entertainment In Video EVS 1095 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director Hector Babenco (S&S April 1992)

Battle of the Bulge

USA 1965/Warner S0 12768 Price £12.99/ Widescreen
Certificate PG Director Ken Annakin (MFB No. 385)

The Big Steal

Australia 1990/Warner S0 35393 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director Nadia Tass (MFB No. 687)

Blade Runner: The Director’s Cut

USA 1982/Warner PES 12682 Price £12.99/ Widescreen
Certificate 15 Director Ridley Scott *114 minutes*
A shorter version of Scott’s bleak vision of the future. This is the intended cinema cut that was rejected by Warners in 1982 in favour of an upbeat ending with Harrison Ford’s now-missing narration. (MFB No. 584 Review of original film)

The Burning Bed

USA 1986/Odyssey ODY 758 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director Robert Greenwald
Executive Producers John Avnet, Steve Tisch
Screenplay Rose Goldemberg *Lead Actors* Farrah Fawcett, Paul LeMat, Richard Masur, Grace Zabriskie *95 minutes*
A shocking exposé of domestic violence with Farrah Fawcett superb as a battered wife who eventually kills her husband. Much better than the more publicised *Extremities* in which Fawcett played a similar role.

Castaway

UK 1986/Warner S0 31104 Price £8.99
Certificate 15 Director Nicolas Roeg
A single woman answers an advert to become a “girl Friday” to a lecherous bore on a desert island in Roeg’s surprisingly straightforward account of real-life events. Voyeurism, impotence and madness rear their heads. (MFB No. 637)

Christopher Columbus: The Discovery

USA 1992/Braveworld STV 2198 Price £10.99
Certificate PG Director John Glen (S&S October 1992)

Le Cop 2 (Ripoux contre ripoux)

France 1989/Tartan Video TVT 1073S Price £15.99
Certificate 15 Director Claude Zidi
While awaiting a disciplinary hearing two bent Parisian flics (who have been framed) plot to oust their more corrupt replacements. Philippe Noiret steals the show in this amiable retread. *Subtitles* (S&S July 1991)

Cover Girl

USA 1944/Columbia TriStar CVR 10742 Price £9.99
Certificate U Director Charles Vidor
Brooklyn nightclub owner Gene Kelly, in love with one of his dancers (Rita Hayworth), discovers that things change when Hayworth wins a cover girl contest. (MFB No. 126)

Detective (Détective)

France/Switzerland 1985/ Artificial Eye ART 059 Price £15.99
Certificate 15 Director Jean-Luc Godard
A witty shaggy-dog story about an inept hotel detective who tries to solve a murder with his nephew but is waylaid by an assortment of mysterious characters trying to doublecross one another. *Subtitles* (MFB No. 626)

False Arrest

USA 1991/Braveworld STV 2206 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director Bill L. Norton (S&S Video April 1992)

For Your Eyes Only

UK 1981/MGM/UA S0 50180/S0 51725 Price £9.99 (Fullscreen)/ £12.99 (Widescreen)
Certificate PG Director John Glen
Bond (Roger Moore) uncovers a lost device on a shipwreck that threatens to destroy British submarines. After directing the disastrous *Moonraker*, John Glen seems to have recovered his composure. One of the best in the Bond series. *B/W* (MFB No. 571)

From Here to Eternity

USA 1953/Columbia TriStar CVR 10254 Price £9.99
Certificate PG Director Fred Zinnemann
There is much to recommend in this classic with Burt Lancaster’s tough soldier, Frank Sinatra’s likeable Italian-American GI, Montgomery Clift’s refusal to join the boxing team, Ernest Borgnine as the sadistic sergeant and, of course, *the* beach scene. *B/W* (MFB No. 239)

Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man

USA 1991/MGM/UA SO 54000 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director Simon Wincer (S&S December 1991)

Holiday

USA 1938/Columbia TriStar CVR 11329 Price £9.99
Certificate U Director George Cukor
Cary Grant plays a carefree bachelor who for love’s sake must confront New York’s upper-class society. Only his fiancée’s sister (Katharine Hepburn) understands his need for a new life. Remake of the 1930 film based on Philip Barry’s play. *B/W* (MFB No. 56)

Horror Hospital

UK 1973/VIPCO VIP 037 Price £12.99
Certificate 18 Director Antony Balch
A brilliant but demented doctor (Michael Gough) who performs brain experiments at a remote hospital is bothered by an inquisitive couple. A curate’s egg for horror aficionados. (MFB No. 473)

It Happened One Night

USA 1934/Columbia TriStar CVR 10627 Price £9.99
Certificate U Director Frank Capra
Delightful classic about a cynical reporter (Clark Gable) who falls in love with runaway heiress Claudette Colbert on a bus bound for New York. The actors ooze charm. *B/W* (MFB No. 529)

Jersey Girl

USA 1992/Entertainment In Video EVS 1097 Price £10.99
Certificate 15 Director David Burton Morris (S&S September 1992)

JFK: The Director's Cut
USA 1991/Warner S0 12765 Price £13.99/ Widescreen
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Oliver Stone 198 minutes The 17 minutes of extra footage doesn't make an enormous difference to Stone's lengthy portrait of DA Jim Garrison's investigation into Kennedy's death. Seven 'new' or extended scenes involve the establishment further trying to discredit Garrison. (S&S February 1992)
Knife in the Water (Noz w Wodzie)
Poland 1962/Connoisseur CR 080 Price £15.99
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director Roman Polanski Polanski's debut feature is a brilliant example of economical film-making. A young couple pick up a male hitchhiker <i>en route</i> to a quiet weekend aboard a yacht. The hitchhiker begins to compete for the woman's attentions as the confines of the boat become even more claustrophobic. <i>Subtitles B/W</i> (S&S March 1993)
Labyrinth of Passion (Laberinto de pasiones)
Spain 1982/Tartan Video TVT 1072S Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Pedro Almodóvar The daughter of a brilliant gynaecologist falls in love with an heir to an Arabian fortune against the background of a bizarre sexual tour of Madrid which takes in student terrorists, dry-cleaners and Almodóvar in drag. <i>Subtitles</i> (S&S February 1993)
Law of Desire (La ley del deseo)
Spain 1987/Tartan Video TVT 1016S Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Pedro Almodóvar Pablo, a gay director, has an affair with a straight man who after the experience turns into a demanding homosexual lover. To complicate matters further, Pablo's transsexual sister is having a fling with a beautiful lesbian model in this outrageous and hilarious tale of lust and jealousy. <i>Subtitles</i> (MFB No. 658)
Live Wire
USA 1992/Entertainment In Video EVS 1096 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Christian Duguay (S&S Video January 1993)
Manhunt: Search for the Night Stalker
USA 1989/Braveworld STV 2207 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Bruce Seth Green <i>Producer</i> Joel Fields <i>Screenplay</i> Joseph Gunn <i>Lead Actors</i> Richard Jordan, A. Martinez, Lisa Eilbacher, Julie Carmen 89 minutes True story drama about two cops who try to solve the case of a serial killer on the loose in Los Angeles.
Mean Streets
USA 1973/Electric Pictures EP 0027B Price £15.99
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Martin Scorsese Would-be restaurateur Harvey Keitel is held back in his career in New York's Little Italy by his relationship with troublemaker Robert De Niro and love for De Niro's epileptic cousin (Amy Robinson). Scorsese's near-perfect characterisations are infused with Catholic dilemmas. A powerful and violent film. (S&S April 1993)



Those Greyhound blues: Clark Gable, Claudette Colbert in 'It Happened One Night'

Midnight
USA 1980/VIPCO VIP 038 Price £12.99
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director John Russo <i>Producer</i> Donald Redinger <i>Screenplay</i> John Russo <i>Lead Actors</i> Lawrence Tierney, John Amplas, Melanie Verlin, John Hall 90 minutes In this mediocre shocker, two college students and a female hitchhiker find themselves in a town plagued by racial prejudice and a family of devil worshippers.
Midnight Express
UK 1978/Columbia TriStar CVR 30006 Price £10.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Alan Parker (MFB No. 534)
Mon père ce héros
France 1991/Tartan Video TVT 1069S Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director Gérard Lauzier A father's relationship with his 15-year-old daughter is put to the test during a summer holiday when she tells her new boyfriend that her father is her lover. Crowd pleaser starring Gérard Depardieu. <i>Subtitles</i> (S&S November 1992)
Mr Smith Goes to Washington
USA 1939/Columbia TriStar CVR 10381 Price £9.99
<i>Certificate U</i> Director Frank Capra James Stewart is the naive but idealistic scout master who goes to Washington to finish the term of a dead senator and begins to realise how corrupt his home state is. <i>B/W</i> (MFB No. 72)
Nikita
France 1990/Artificial Eye ART 063 Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Luc Besson A punk junkie is arrested during a police shoot-out and trades her life sentence for a life as a government assassin. Besson's chic study of <i>Terminator</i> -style designer violence relies too much on the set pieces. <i>Subtitles</i> (MFB No. 682)
Octopussy
UK 1983/MGM/UA S0 50294/S0 51640 Price £9.99 (Fullscreen)/ £12.99 (Widescreen)
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director John Glen Spectacular aerial stuntwork and sumptuous photography of India highlight Roger Moore's sixth rental of the Bond tuxedo. Steven Berkoff is a Russian villain trying to strike at NATO with no fear of nuclear retaliation due to the West's peace policy. (MFB No. 594)
Pal Joey
USA 1957/Columbia TriStar CVR 11205 Price £9.99
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director George Sidney This Rodgers and Hart classic is made by Frank Sinatra's wisecracks and delivery of songs such as 'The Lady Is a Tramp'. Sinatra attempts to open a slick nightclub in San Francisco while being pursued by Rita Hayworth and Kim Novak. (MFB No. 288)
Pepi, Luci, Bom (Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón)
Spain 1981/Tartan TVT 1014S Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Pedro Almodóvar A punk sensibility penetrates Almodóvar's fun debut feature – which could be described as a series of porno sketches within a naturalistic setting. The loose storyline (extended from a short to feature length) involves Pepi, an heiress raped by a policeman, falling in love with his battered wife Bom after an introduction by Pepi's punk singer friend Luci. <i>Subtitles</i> (S&S August 1992)
Point Blank
USA 1967/MGM/UA S0 50278 Price £8.99
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director John Boorman The censor still considers this revenge thriller to be worthy of an 18 certificate. Lee Marvin is magnificent as the gangster double-crossed by his wife and left for dead only to show up years later bent on revenge. (MFB No. 409)
Psych-Out
USA 1968/MIA V 3365 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Richard Rush A deaf runaway ends up in Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco during the height of the psychedelic explosion, looking for her brother but falling in love with Jack Nicholson's rock musician instead. (MFB No. 468)
Ruby
USA 1992/Columbia TriStar CVR 24253 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director John Mackenzie (S&S July 1992)
Schtonk!
Germany 1992/Artificial Eye ART 058 Price £15.99/ Widescreen
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Helmut Dietl Broad slapstick comedy based on the forging of the Hitler diaries that apparently had German audiences clutching their sides with laughter. <i>Subtitles</i> (S&S February 1993)

Shoot the Moon
USA 1981/Warner S0 50141 Price £8.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Alan Parker A dull domestic drama about a housewife (Diane Keaton) and her affluent writer husband (Albert Finney) whose marriage and family are disintegrating. Everyone suffers, especially their four daughters and the audience. (MFB No. 581)
Small Sacrifices
USA 1990/Odyssey ODY 753 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director David Greene <i>Producer</i> S. Bryan Hickox <i>Screenplay</i> Joyce Eliason, based on the book by Ann Rule <i>Lead Actors</i> Farrah Fawcett, Gordon Clapp, Ryan O'Neal, John Shea 182 minutes True-life courtroom melodrama with Farrah Fawcett as a woman convicted of attempting to kill her children because of her new boyfriend's unwillingness to become a stepfather.
Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country
USA 1991/CIC Video VHR 2760 Price £13.99
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director Nicholas Meyer (S&S March 1992)
Street War
USA 1992/Braveworld STV 2208 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Dick Lowry (S&S Video December 1992)
Superman
USA 1978/Warner S0 12769 Price £12.99/ Widescreen
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director Richard Donner (MFB No. 541)
Taxi Driver
USA 1976/Columbia TriStar CVR 30019 Price £10.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Martin Scorsese (MFB No. 512)
Thelma & Louise
USA 1991/Warner PES 52410 Price £12.99/ Widescreen
<i>Certificate 15</i> Director Ridley Scott (S&S July 1991)
A View to a Kill
UK 1985/ MGM/UA S0 52041/S0 51726 Price £9.99 (Fullscreen)/ £12.99 (Widescreen)
<i>Certificate PG</i> Director John Glen Bond must stop an international industrialist who intends to pump water into the San Andreas fault, triggering a major earthquake. Christopher Walken replaced David Bowie in the villain's role. (MFB No. 618)
What Have I Done to Deserve This? (¡¡Que he hecho YO para merecer esto!!)
Spain 1984/Tartan Video TVT 1018S Price £15.99/Widescreen
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Pedro Almodóvar A neurotic middle-aged housewife tries to cope with modern life in Madrid. Her disinterested taxi driver husband is obsessed with a past affair and her two sons have discovered drugs and sex. <i>Subtitles</i> (MFB No. 668)
Wild Orchid: The Red Shoe Diary
USA 1992/Entertainment In Video EVS 1094 Price £10.99
<i>Certificate 18</i> Director Zalman King (S&S Video December 1992)

Women in Love

UK 1969/Warner S0 51760 Price £8.99

Certificate 18 Director Ken Russell

The story of two sisters with one ending up happily married and the other sister suffering an uneasy romance which ends in tragedy. Russell's finest film is gripping thanks to sturdy performances, especially from Oliver Reed.

(MFB No. 431)

Retail premiere

Hells Angels on Wheels

USA 1967/MIA V 3265 Price £10.99

Certificate 18 Director Richard Rush

Producer Joe Solomon Screenplay

R. Wright Campbell Lead Actors

Jack Nicholson, Adam Rourke,

Sabrina Scharf, Jana Taylor 90 minutes

Jack Nicholson plays a gas pump attendant called Poet in this likeable biker movie about a gang's violent trek across America. Aka: *Leader of the Pack*.

Intervista

Italy 1987/Western Connection WEST 003 Price £14.99

Certificate 15 Director Federico Fellini

Producer Ibrahim Moussa Screenplay

Federico Fellini Lead Actors

Federico Fellini, Marcello Mastroianni, Anita Ekberg, Sergio Rubini 105 minutes

Fellini's 50th anniversary celebration of Cinecittà Studios begins with a Japanese TV crew arriving to make a documentary about the director and then moves into a reflection on the director's past (with Rubini as the 18-year-old Fellini) and a treatise on the magic of film. Marcello Mastroianni is reunited with his *La dolce vita* co-star Anita Ekberg. *Subtitles*

Kill and Pray (Requiescant)

Italy/West Germany 1967/Aktiv AKT 0004 Price £12.99/Widescreen

Certificate 15 Director/Producer

Carlo Lizzani Screenplay Adriano Bolzoni,

Armando Crispino, Lucio Battistrada

Lead Actors Lou Castel, Mark Damon,

Pier Paolo Pasolini, Barbara Frey,

Franco Citti 102 minutes

Strong performances from Castel and Damon, a bizarre supporting performance from Pasolini, sadism and a good deal of invention perk up this political Western about the class struggle between Mexicans and Confederates. A messianic picaro, trying to free his half-sister from enforced prostitution, discovers that he is the lone survivor of a massacre and seeks revenge. *Subtitles*

Rebel Rousers

USA 1967/MIA V3366 Price £10.99

Certificate 18 Director/Producer

Martin B. Cohen Screenplay Abe Polsky,

Michael Kars, Martin B. Cohen Lead Actors

Jack Nicholson, Diane Ladd, Bruce Dern,

Cameron Mitchell, Harry Dean Stanton

80 minutes

Cameron Mitchell and Bruce Dern stage a drag race over Dern's girlfriend. Jack Nicholson also stars in this film which would have been forgotten were it not for the clutch of big names.

Sewage Baby

USA 1989/VIPCO VIP 036 Price £12.99

Certificate 18 Director Francis Teri

Producers Michael Helman, Francis Teri

Screenplay Francis Teri Lead Actors

Frank Reeves, Lisa Patruno,

Marie Michaels 84 minutes

Dubious intentions fuel this crude shocker about an aborted foetus which mutates in toxic waste and returns to the brothel-abortion clinic to kill the prostitutes and drive the mother insane.

Thirst

Australia 1988/VIPCO VIP 039

Price £12.99

Certificate 18 Director Rod Hardy Producer

Antony Ginnane Screenplay John Pinkney

Lead Actors Chantal Contouri,

David Hemmings, Henry Silva,

Max Phipps, Shirley Cameron 90 minutes

A woman is kidnapped by a satanic brotherhood and taken to a remote village where she is subjected to diabolical tortures in this occasionally effective humdrum shocker.

Victimised

USA 1986/MIA V 3354 Price £10.99

Certificate 18 Director William Graham

Producer James O'Fallon Screenplay

Scott Swanton, Gregory S. Dinallo

Lead Actors Tom Skerritt, Sharon Stone,

Robert Morse, Robert Culp 95 minutes

Standard stalk-and-slash with Sharon Stone playing the centre-spread model who is the next intended victim of a serial killer. Tom Skerritt is the married cop who investigates.

Laser disc

The Last Emperor

Columbia TriStar LD 11419

PAL CLV (2 disc set) Fullscreen 1.33:1

China/Italy 1987 Price £34.99

Certificate 15 Director Bernardo Bertolucci

Bertolucci's screen portrayal of the Chinese Emperor Pi Yu boasts excellent performances by Peter O'Toole and John Lone. The film's stunning visual impact is sadly diminished by the fullscreen format, but it remains impressive.

(MFB No. 650)

The Lawnmower Man

Pioneer PLFEB 30761

PAL CLV Widescreen 1.66:1

USA 1992 Price £24.99

(S&S Video December 1992)

Midnight Express

Columbia TriStar LD 10006

PAL CLV Widescreen 1.85:1

UK 1987 Price £24.99

(See Video Retail)

Misery

Pioneer PLFEB 30741

PAL CLV Fullscreen 1.33:1

USA 1990 Price £24.99

(S&S Video May 1992)

Single White Female

Columbia TriStar LD 14588

PAL CLV Fullscreen 1.33:1

USA 1992 Price £24.99

(S&S Video June 1993)

Taxi Driver

Columbia TriStar LD 10019

PAL CLV Widescreen 1.85:1

USA 1976 Price £24.99

(See Video Retail)

WIND UP

By Mark Kermode and Peter Dean

There is an awareness in the film industry today that everything has more than one life. Most films given a theatrical release will end up on video as well as gaining a television screening, and many TV or made-for-video films will yearn for and sometimes even attain a theatrical release. Yet despite this complex situation, in which it is increasingly difficult to decide if there is something distinctive about a cinema film, there remains an apparently unshakeable artistic hierarchy, with cinema films on top and video films and made-for-TV films as the lowly cousins of the film world.

The poor status of home-entertainment films seems ironic, particularly since television and video have allowed much-needed funding to be injected into the cinema industry. Cinema now enjoys large influxes of cash from television, not least in Britain where Channel 4 and the BBC have put money into projects as various as 'Sarafinal', 'Leon the Pig Farmer' and 'The Crying Game'. Video is even more vital to cinema's survival. Production companies which previously relied on income from a film's theatrical rentals and TV sales can now count on huge profits from video rental and retail releases, making films which would once have been deemed financially unsupportable a viable proposition. Big budget films such as 'Terminator II: Judgment Day' could not have been made if it were not for the certainty of remunerative video sales, and many low-budget independent movies – a good example being 'Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer' – were financed by companies whose primary marketplace was video.

Yet despite the dependence of cinema on its more 'vulgar' siblings – terrestrial television, pay and cable television, video and laser disc – the theatrical market still retains the critical kudos. A good example of a film which can't quite find its place in the hierarchy is Stephen Frears' adaptation of Roddy ('The Commitments') Doyle's 'The Snapper', a film which within a three-month period will have had a television screening, a cinema screening at the Cannes Film Festival, a domestic theatrical release and a video release. What kind of beast is this film? And does it matter whether it is described as a cinema or TV film?

'The Snapper' was made for British television and was screened in April this year on the BBC. Yet at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival in May it was treated as a theatrical film and earned itself a cinema release in France: "We think of it as a cinema film," explained one Cannes jury member. "It doesn't matter if the English think

of it as a TV movie." Indeed, 'The Snapper' was so highly regarded by the Cannes organisers that it was selected to open the Directors Fortnight at the festival, a rare accolade for a made-for-TV film.

Electric Pictures, which owns the UK distribution rights to 'The Snapper', is now – after the film's warm reception – giving it a limited theatrical run here prior to its video release. Frears' previous made-for-TV feature 'My Beautiful Laundrette' was enlarged from a 16mm print to 35mm to facilitate a theatrical release after a rapturous reception at the Edinburgh Film Festival.

The practice of transferring TV movies to the big screen is nothing new. In 1973 Arthur Barron's tale of teenage love – 'Jeremy' – was blown up from a 16mm print and released in the cinema in the UK, as was Wes Craven's superior American television chiller 'Stranger in Our House' in 1978 under the new title 'Summer of Fear'. More recently, the BBC-financed romantic fantasy 'Truly, Madly, Deeply' was released theatrically prior to its television debut. Although applauded as a fine piece of film-making, 'Truly, Madly, Deeply' raised questions about the suitability of theatrical airings of made-for-TV films. Shot in the now theatrically redundant Academy screen ratio which roughly approximates the dimensions of an average TV screen, the film appeared to lose much of its intimate power in the cinema, swamped by the wider demands of the big screen.

So is it wise to give 'The Snapper', a film made for television, a cinema release? The question is one that has plagued both TV and video films since the mid 80s. At that time in the video industry there existed a vogue for 'theatrical platforming' – an expensive practice whereby movies intended for video release would be granted a perfunctory (and derisively short) cinema run. It was argued that even if no one went to see a movie in the cinema, the media boost the film would gain on its video release would justify the effort and expense. Critics, video dealers and consumers would somehow take the video more seriously if it had been first seen on the big screen.

In the case of made-for-TV movies such as 'The Snapper', which earn theatrical releases as a result of television critical acclaim, this process is clearly reversed. Yet perhaps there is still an argument for allowing such movies to thrive in the environment for which they were designed – the small screen – without demanding that they also perform well in the cinema. Television and video deserve their own triumphs.

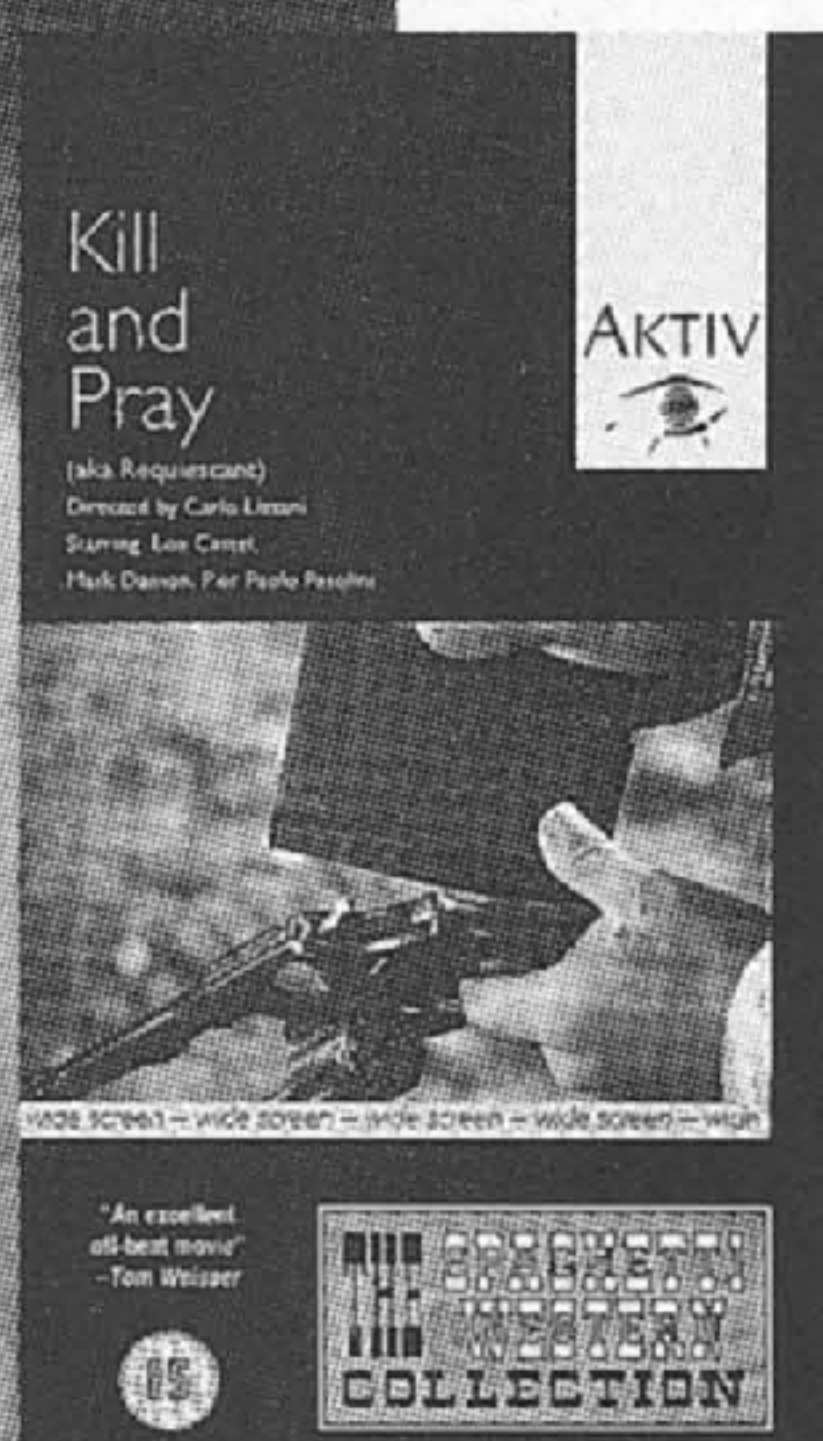


A television film or a cinema movie? The Curley family in 'The Snapper'

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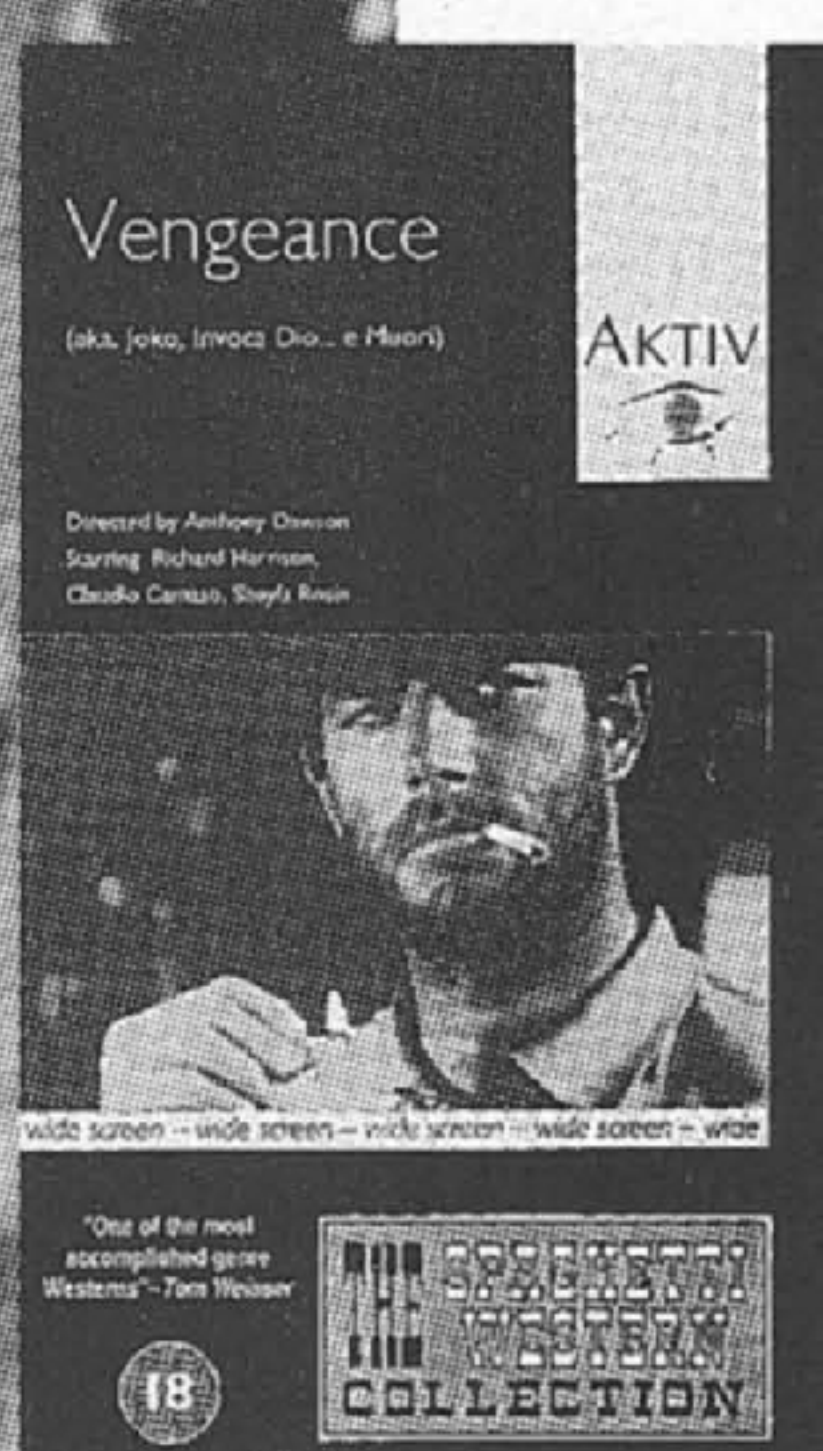
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KILL AND PRAY

(aka. Requiescant)

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VENGEANCE

(aka. Joko, Invoca Dio... e Muori)

Release date: July 12th
Joko finds the drawn-and-quartered body of his 'brother' Richie and seeks vengeance, as in Leone's ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST. A western and a crime thriller rolled into one, this gothic movie is one of the most accomplished genre westerns, mixing an eerie flamboyance with brutal violence. Widescreen



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Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight and Sound, British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL. Facsimile 071 436 2327

Star martyr

From Keith Reader

Simon Watney's piece on *Les Nuits fauves* (S&S June) quite rightly indicts successive French governments' lackadaisical approach to the spread of Aids, but is I think too sweeping in its condemnation of the film as simply another part of the problem. France in certain respects has a less homophobic culture than Britain; André Gide was not subjected to the same harassment and humiliation as Oscar Wilde, and more recently the first Socialist government lowered the gay age of consent to 16, a move the non-Le-Penist right has to the best of my knowledge not sought to reverse.

A degree of Catholic hypocrisy has undoubtedly been at work in the disgracefully low-key preventive advertising campaigns, but the reception of *Les Nuits fauves* in France – both film and best-selling novel – has probably done more to develop consciousness of Aids and the need for action to prevent its spread than any other single phenomenon. Collard's funeral was attended by a great number of young people, and in the weeks following the César ceremony French newspapers and magazines could seemingly speak of little else.

That a star martyr was required to bring about a shift in public perception is an appalling thought; but the "ghastly, weary fatalism" of which Watney accuses French (homo)sexuality may now be reaching its end. If Collard's work was complicit with this, then it is surely appropriate that it is also a factor in helping to change it.

London N5

Video piracy

Name and address supplied

In the June issue of *Sight and Sound* Peter Dean points out the inconsistencies in the BBFC's application of video ratings, cuts and rejections. But a number of equally disturbing anomalies surround the recent action taken against the allegedly unauthorised screening of *Clockwork Orange* by Warner Bros and the Federation Against Copyright Theft. For instance, it was repeatedly claimed that merely to have a copy of this film on video in the UK was an offence. This, of course, is complete nonsense. Warner Bros makes this subject available to thousands of perfectly legal video outlets in many EC countries and throughout the US. Copies can be purchased, a receipt obtained, and there is no warning given to customers that if they take the video into the UK they are breaking the law. Indeed, hundreds of mail-order stockists all over the world advertise *Clockwork Orange* in their catalogues and are only too happy to receive orders from video collectors in the UK. Warner Bros continues to make a great deal of money from video rentals and sales while supporting FACT in its scare tactics.

It is a constant industry claim that video piracy in this country is on a massive scale and distributors suffer huge revenue losses as this underground industry goes unchecked. FACT makes raids on video shops and on the occasional pirate "fac-

tory" and even tackles schools and museums who are allegedly showing duplicated tapes "to the public". Yet the number of illegal copies seized from such raids is a drop in the ocean compared to the millions of tapes that flood virtually unchecked into South Africa, the Far East and dozens of Third World countries. A friend staying in a Cape Town hotel was recently offered the pick of five major Hollywood releases to be piped to the television in her suite. Not one of the titles had been officially released on video in the US and the hotel manager also offered a wide range of illegally taped BBC and ITV programmes, some of which were less than two weeks old. Single small breaches of copyright pale into insignificance in the light of such vast violation.

Surely the major companies and organisations such as FACT should stop providing the tabloids with 'video den' stories and apply their vested interests to the international pirates who flood half the world with unauthorised booty.

Banned films

From Tom Zaniello

Peter Wollen's argument (S&S May) that the evolving canon is created by archivists, academics/critics, film-makers and "film buffs and cultists" is compelling. But I would like to suggest a category of film that resists canonisation because it resists being seen – or, to phrase it slightly differently, the film is virtually banned from sight despite some efforts from Wollen's "gate-keepers". I raise the issue in connection with Samuel Fuller's *White Dog*. Fuller himself is, of course, cultish. Some of us find *Shock Corridor* or *Pickup on South Street* to be defining statements of American agit-kitsch; others disagree. *White Dog* would be placed in the discussion, but so few people have seen it that it is virtually a banned film.

Fuller adapted Roman Gary's memoir published under the same title in 1970, in which Jean Seberg adopts a stray German shepherd dog only to discover that he has been trained to attack black people. Fuller transformed Gary's 'racist' grey dog into a white dog and the frail Kristy McNichol played the Seberg role. During production in 1980, the American NAACP demanded and received the right to be on set, eventually denouncing the film because they feared it would become a "training document" for future racists. Black actor Paul Winfield who plays Keys (the trainer who tries to reverse the dog's conditioning) said he never felt that the film was racist and that the NAACP was over-reacting. Fuller's ironies were lost in the previews and openings somewhere in 1981 and the film was shelved, although its Paris opening may have been affected by a change in title (*Trained to Kill*). Seberg's controversial involvement with the Black Panthers and her mysterious death in 1979 (followed eventually by Gary's suicide) may have also contaminated the reception.

The film was sporadically rereleased over the next decade, once on cable television in 1984 and then occasionally in the last few years when a Paramount executive, formerly a repertory theatre programmer, convinced the company to let him ship it out to festivals and theatres here and there. Then in 1991 a *New Yorker* column revealed the

film to be the "Holy Grail" of repertory theatres. Two of three *Village Voice* critics placed it on their 10 Best Lists for 1991. I screened it in 1992 to small but fascinated audiences in Cincinnati, Ohio; the local press corps, no doubt exhausted from the Mapplethorpe obscenity trial, ignored it.

I am not offering *White Dog* for the canon, but how could it even be promoted by Wollen's gate-keepers if the gate is conveniently invisible?

Fort Thomas, Kentucky, US

Local authority

From David Petrie

Your editorial on film censorship in Britain (S&S May) made some telling points, but missed one important factor, namely that local councillors have the authority to ban films from being shown in their area.

For example, Glasgow District Council has banned *Romper Stomper* from Glasgow cinemas, despite the film having a BBFC certificate. This meant that many people, myself included, simply went to see the film in Clydebank, some two miles over the city boundary. It is surely time that local councillors, hardly noted for their in-depth knowledge of film, had this power of censorship removed.

Glasgow

Spaghetti variations

From John Pritchard

I enjoyed the feature on political Spaghetti Westerns (S&S June) to coincide with their release on video. I wonder, however, if any readers can enlighten me as to why there are now two differently-scripted versions of Damiani's *A Bullet for the General*.

The (more-or-less complete) 35mm version that sometimes turns up in repertory cinemas has quite different (and superior) dubbing to the video release. In the cinema version, Volonte dubs himself, as he did in the Dollar Westerns, and makes Chunchu a more convincing character as a result.

But the differences are in content as well as quality. Take the initial train ambush. In the video version, the officer tied across the track pathetically tells the lieutenant commanding the train that he must work out for himself what to do. In the cinema print, he orders the lieutenant to proceed, on the grounds that the lives of all on the train are worth more than the life of one man. To ascribe such courage to a character representing 'the enemy' in this film is a bold stroke, and indicative of the maturity of its thought. But a lot of this strength seems to have been lost in the re-dubbed version.

Basingstoke, Hants

Corrections

May 1993: *Paris vu par...* (p.69) is not black and white as stated. The caption 'John Candy in *Home Alone*' (p.69) should read 'John Candy in *Only the Lonely*'.

June 1993: The photographs illustrating the reviews of *Army of Darkness* (p.46) and *Being at Home with Claude* (p.48) were transposed. The 'Story' credit in the *Matinee* review (p.59) was credited to 'Jerico Haas'. This should read: 'Jerico, Charlie Haas'.

Days of Independence: Manchester has 2½ million inhabitants, not as stated; the Odeon has 7 screens, not as stated. These were typographic, not author's errors.



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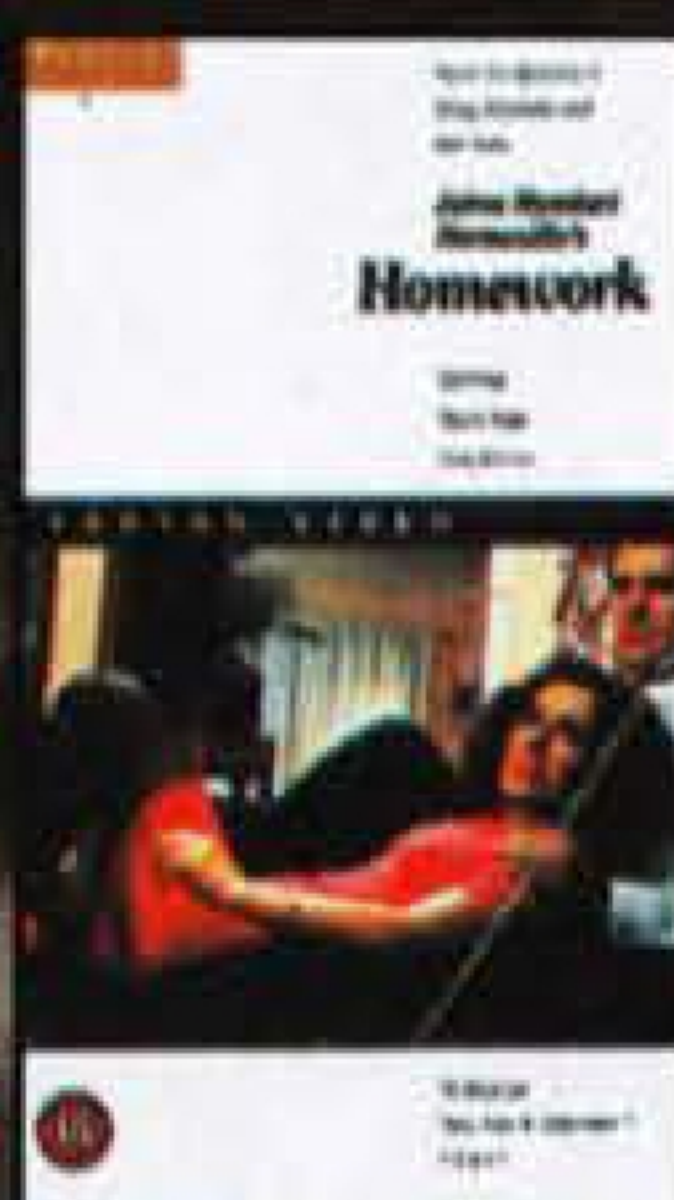
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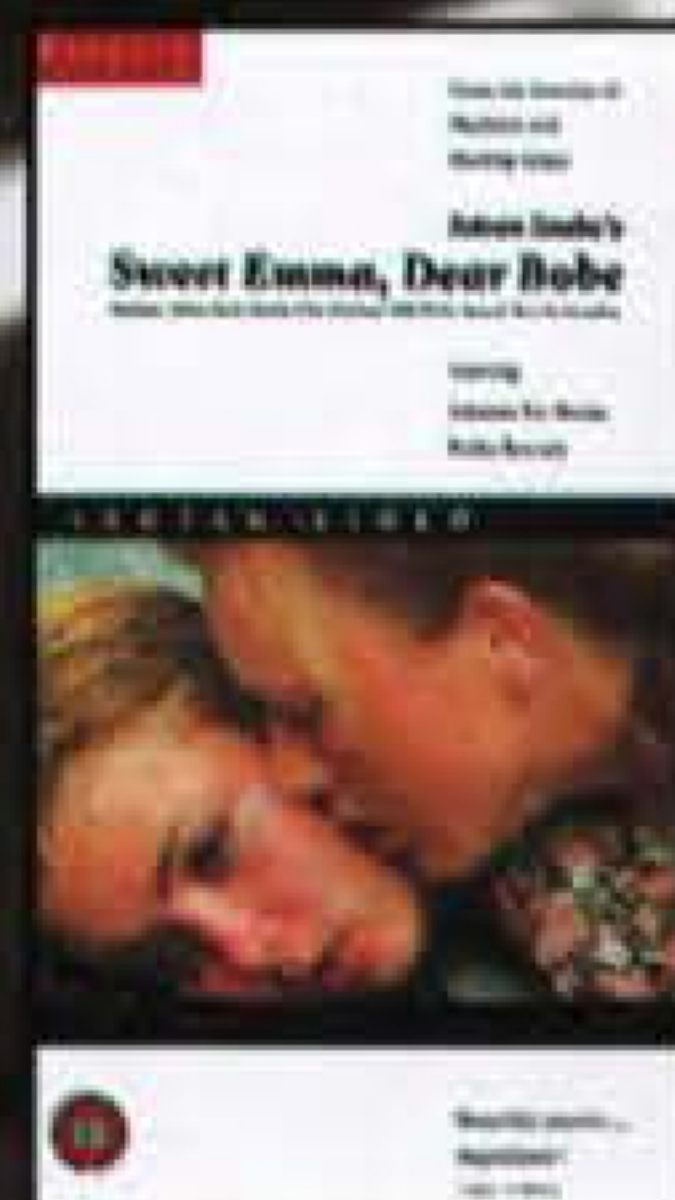
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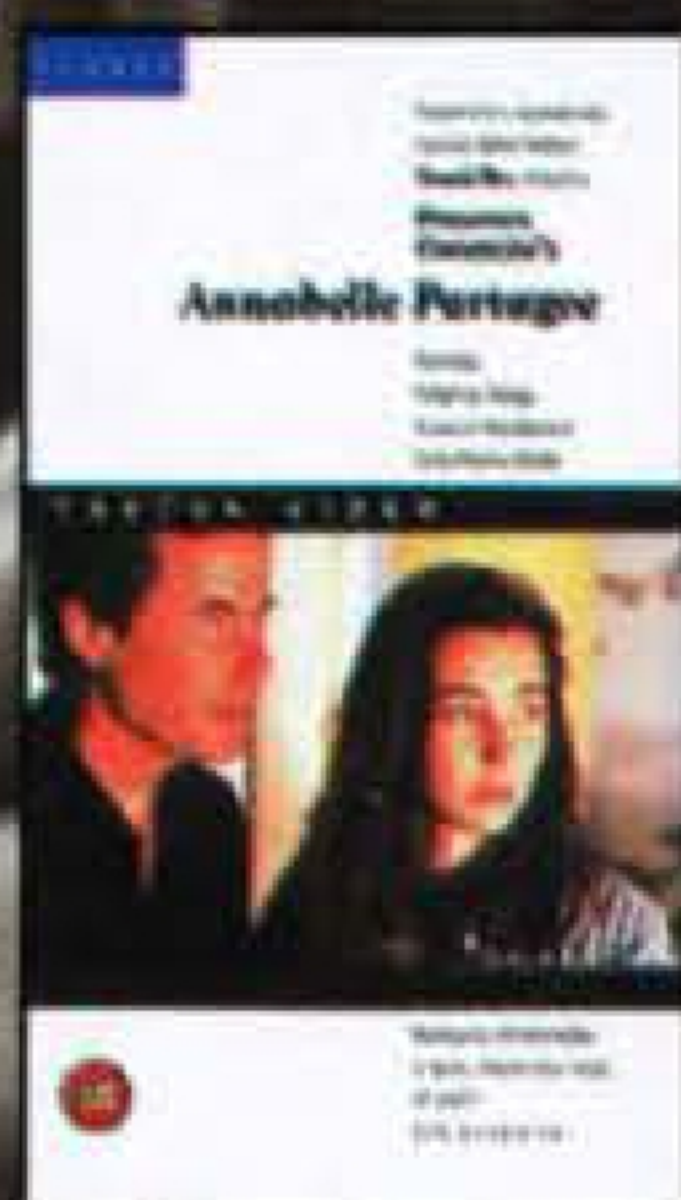
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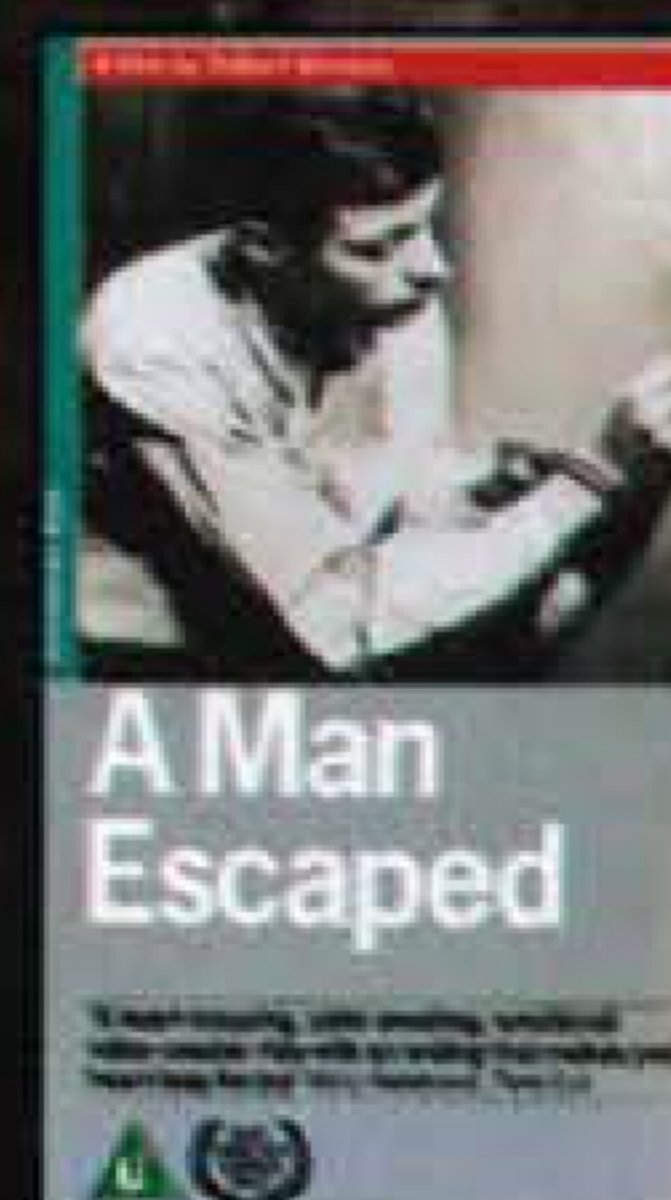
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